“THE OTHER HALF IS MINE”: CHARLOTTE MOORMAN AS AN ARCHITECT OF THE AVANT-GARDE

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Charlotte Moorman (1933–1991) was a Juilliard-trained cellist whose life and work made an indelible mark on the development of the American avant-garde. In her career, Moorman acted as a performer, collaborator, composer, administrator and muse. She solely founded the inaugural New York Avant Garde Festival, and subsequently directed fifteen of these festivals between 1963 and 1980, the feat for which she is most widely acknowledged today. Yet, her revolutionary performance practice, which blurred the lines between her life, her body, and her work, and brought into focus the dynamics of corporeality, the feminine body, female nudity and sexuality, and gendered politics within the contexts of musical performance, has so far escaped serious consideration in the written histories of the American avant-garde. This dissertation describes the nature of Moorman's practice as one that evolved to become inherently and irrevocably embodied, explores how this approach fell at odds with the pervasive avant-garde philosophies of music, and illustrates how her work troubles even a feminist musicological analysis. Further, through a contemporary critique of Moorman's oeuvre which centralizes the social, cultural, and political implications of her body in performance as integral to the work, this project offers a retrospective visibility to the artist which allows for a reframing of her practice as foundational to the aesthetic development of the postwar musical avant-garde. By way of these efforts, Moorman's legacy is presented as one that is both historically significant and vital to current and future musicological discourse.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my Nana, Gloria Jean Cooper (1943–2020), the epitome of Southern grit and grace whose heart I will always carry inside my own.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2015, I was on my way to rehearsal for Nova, the university's new music ensemble, when a newspaper clipping pinned to the door of Nova director Elizabeth McNutt's office caught my eye. "Musical Phrases and Prison Sentences" was the banner headline, beneath which was printed a large photograph of a wet-haired Charlotte Moorman, clothed in translucent cellophane and balancing her cello's endpin in the mouth of video artist Nam June Paik.[1] Her image was striking, and immediately my mind filled with a dozen questions: Who is this artist? Why is she nearly naked, and dripping wet? What is her connection to Nam June Paik, the artist whose name is consistently swirling about in conversations with my wife, who herself is a media artist? I continued reading the article, which happened to be a book review for Joan Rothfuss's *Topless Cellist*, the first and only biography of the artist Charlotte Moorman, published in 2014. My interest was piqued. I purchased Rothfuss's book, and, in reading more about Moorman's career, I asked myself a question that would become the genesis of this project: why, in my decade of studying music, had I never heard of her?

Through Rothfuss's work, I learned that Moorman was the seemingly forgotten founder and director of the New York Avant Garde Festival; that she frequently collaborated with Paik, yes, but also that she worked closely with some of the avant-garde's most revered composers such as John Cage and Takehisa Kosugi; that her network included such legendary feminist performance artists as Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneeman, and Alison Knowles; and that the "topless cellist" moniker was one that stuck with her when she was arrested, mid-performance, for playing her cello while half-nude as instructed by the score for Paik's *Opera Sextronique*. A

[1] Norman Lebrecht, "Book Review: 'Topless Cellist' by Joan Rothfuss," *Wall Street Journal,* October 3, 2014.

Juilliard-trained classical cellist, Moorman appeared, to me, as a skillful, radical, revolutionary, genre-bending artist whom history had regrettably overlooked; and I wanted to rectify her absence from modern discourse by reinserting her work into the historical narrative of the American avant-garde. Luckily, Moorman's archive is housed just one short flight away, in Northwestern University's Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections; so I booked a trip to Chicago and embarked on a mission to rescue Moorman from musicological obscurity.

Inspired by the recuperative efforts of the many feminist musicologists who came before me, my initial intent was to showcase Moorman's career as ahead of its time: a lifework of pioneering practices that defied expectation and boldly ushered in new definitions of music, art, and feminism. In her archive, I expected to find evidence of authorship and ownership that history had mistakenly accredited to Moorman's male counterparts; or perhaps to come across letters or journal entries that concretized the notion that she consciously pushed the boundaries of genre and tradition. She was, after all, regarded by Edgard Varèse as the "Jeanne d'Arc of New Music," a descriptor she gleefully perpetuated.[2] Further, as a fourth-wave feminist, I saw Moorman's nudity in performance as a bold statement of bodily agency, foreshadowing a feminism that embraced femininity and female sexuality without regard to male desire or objectivity. I felt sure I would find evidence of Moorman as a tragically censored, radically progressive artist.

Instead, from the materials in her archive, including interviews in magazine and newspaper columns, video recordings of Moorman's late-night talk show appearances, letters to city officials, and court trial documents, emerges a portrait of Moorman that is far less explicitly

[2] Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 106.

defined. An Arkansan by birth, she operated under a guise of feigned innocence and naiveté, embellished by feminine panache and a distinctly Southern charm. She gave no consideration to the notion that her practice was gimmicky or absurd, and hastily defended the composers who had written for her. She clung steadfast to the "rules" of musical performance, often appearing in formal concert attire and vowing to honor the notated score. Rather than rebuke the hierarchical composer-performer relationship, which current feminist musicology acknowledges as one rooted in patriarchal norms, Moorman adhered firmly to it. In fact, it was her compliance with this system that earned Moorman sharp criticism from her feminist colleagues for allowing male composers to dictate the use of her often-nude body. Though she routinely undressed in performance, only on rare occasion would Moorman lift the veil on her performatively poised persona.

The archive itself serves as a metaphor for Moorman's artistic life. It is massive in volume, with thousands of pieces catalogued and several boxes more waiting in queue. It contains nearly every type of media: musical scores, audio and video recordings, posters and flyers, performance ephemera, bank statements, bills, grocery lists, magazine clippings and newspaper articles (often with Moorman's annotations on the side), valentines, photographs, drawings, recipes, poetry, postal letters, diary entries, and countless loose scraps of paper. "Don't throw anything out," Moorman told her husband, Frank, while on her deathbed;[3] and he apparently obliged: the archive is expansive, unwieldy, excessive, chaotic, and at times, confusing. So, too, was Moorman's career. She often contradicted herself. Sometimes she rejected responsibility for the authorship of controversial pieces, while other times she insisted

[3] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 355.

on receiving credit for her role as collaborator;[4] often she claimed her nudity was inconsequential, other times she overtly overemphasized her feminine sexuality; she was notoriously disorganized and always running late ("that's nothing," she once remarked, "I was late to my own wedding!"),[5] yet she successfully organized fifteen New York Avant Garde Festivals in venues as large as Shea Stadium, Grand Central Station, and the Staten Island Ferry.

What became clear to me is that Moorman was a frustratingly equivocal figure: her intentions somewhat ambiguous, her motives sometimes questionable. Yet, her contributions to the development of the American avant-garde are inestimable, and her work relentlessly calls into question historically accepted boundaries of genre and expectation. Rather than rewriting her narrative in a way that might falsely and posthumously politicize her motives, this dissertation instead investigates elements of her work for how they problematized notions of what was considered acceptable—for women, for musicians, for women musicians—at the time. Further, in reimagining Moorman's practice through a contemporary feminist lens, this project offers a retrospective visibility of her work that reframes her oeuvre as one that is foundational to a current understanding of the postwar American avant-garde, an understanding which in turn lends itself to new musicological discourses surrounding the intersectional impacts and implications of the body in musical performance.

Literature Review

Inarguably the most comprehensive resource on Charlotte Moorman's life and work is Joan Rothfuss's 2014 biography, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman.*

[4] Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman," in *Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology,* ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), unpaginated.

[5] Dan Sullivan, "Way Out in Central Park, it's Avantgarde Day," *New York Times*, September 11, 1966, quoted in Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication," unpaginated.

Topless Cellist is a meticulously researched, beautifully written account of Moorman's life, organized chronologically and divided into three parts. "Part One: Leaving Little Rock (1933–1961)" chronicles Moorman's early life as a small-town girl from Arkansas who played in the symphony and participated in beauty pageants; "Part Two: Queen of the Avant-Garde (1962–1978)" describes, over many chapters, Moorman's activity in the New York Avant Garde art scene; and Part Three: Living While Dying (1979–1991)" chronicles Moorman's final years, in which she weaved together her life and art as she turned her battle with breast cancer into performance art. Rothfuss's text is supplemented by several high-resolution, color photographs and scans from Moorman's archive, and invaluably, interviews with people who knew and remembered the artist. *Topless Cellist* is the first and only biography of Charlotte Moorman, and is a tremendous resource which begs to be expounded upon through further scholarship on Moorman's inestimable career contributions.

Following the publication of *Topless Cellist*, in 2016, staff at the Mary Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University curated an exhibit featuring several items from Moorman's archive. Housed at Northwestern's Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, the archive contains a rich collection of materials from Moorman's career: cellos she created, paraphernalia from the fifteen New York Avant Garde festivals she directed, as well as photographs, journal entries, and film clips. The exhibition and its accompanying book, entitled "A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant Garde, 1960s–1980s," served somewhat as a visual retelling of *Topless Cellist*, utilizing many of the same sources, contexts, and narratives, and Rothfuss herself served as a consultant curator. The "Feast of Astonishments" book is also notable for its critical essays contributed by historians, curators, and artists inspired by the exhibition. In fact, it was Kathy O'Dell's essay in this book that led me to

philosopher Rudolf Carnap's theory of extension/intension, which greatly influenced the second chapter of this dissertation. It was in anticipation and review of this exhibition, which was shown both at Northwestern University and later at New York University, that much of the recent scholarship on Moorman was initiated.

As such, while there are many publications in news and online forums such as Artsy, Guernica, Hyperallergic, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and ArtsJournal's niche blog, StraightUp; academic scholarship on Moorman is scarce, though there are a number of exceptions. Benjamin Piekut devoted a chapter in his 2011 book, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits*, to Moorman's theatrical interpretation of John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player,* suggesting that her interactions with the piece tested the limits of avant-garde notions of the composer's authority and the performer's interpretive freedom. Curator and art historian Sophie Landres has made three laudable contributions to the literature: her 2017 article, "Indecent and Uncanny: The Case against Charlotte Moorman," details Moorman's courtroom trial following her arrest for public indecency; her 2017 PhD dissertation, "Opera for Automatons: Charlotte Moorman's Early Collaborations with Nam June Paik;" and her 2018 article, "The First Non-Human Action Artist," which examines the intervention of technological and robotic figures in Moorman's performative works. Landres's scholarship on Moorman is highly detailed and keenly critical, though she writes as an art historian, whereas this dissertation on Moorman is written from a musical perspective.

Additionally, Saisha Grayson, art historian and now Curator of Time-Based Media at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, published her PhD dissertation in May of 2018, shortly after I submitted my initial proposal for this project. Grayson embarked on her research with aims similar to my own at the start: having grown up hearing stories about Moorman from her

stepfather, a sculptor who was a friend and admirer of Moorman's, Grayson took note of Moorman's notable absence from the art historical canon as she completed her academic study. With a vision that paralleled mine—that of Moorman as a tragically overlooked visionary and pioneer—Grayson similarly sought to recover Moorman's work and reinsert her into the narrative of the art historical avant-garde; and again, similar to my own discoveries, she arrived at the conclusion that the complexity of Moorman's work made any one definition of her work as decisively original or authoritative impossible. Instead, Grayson engages with Moorman's practice as an opportunity to suggest an alternative model for understanding the production of art as decentralized and generative, focusing specifically on the ways in which Moorman's collaborative and co-compositional efforts in performance deterritorialized traditional notions of authorship. Here, my project diverges from Grayson's, as I seek instead to centralize the embodied nature of Moorman's performances (and the sociopolitical implications of her gendered body within its cultural contexts) for how it collided with various avant-garde philosophies of music; and how a twenty-first century feminist musicological approach to her oeuvre both recenters Moorman as a fundamental contributor to the avant-garde, and lays a foundation for future investigations of the many interrelated issues raised by her complex career.

More striking than Moorman's presence in these few essays, articles, dissertations, and book chapters is her absence from most of the literature on Fluxus, the Avant-Garde, Happenings, and feminist performance art of the 1960s to 1980s. Most published materials concerning the artist place Moorman in a subsidiary context within her cohorts. Kristine Stiles, in her chapter "Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus," alludes to Moorman's performances of *Human Cello* and *Opera Sextronique*, but only in reference to how they fit into Paik's oeuvre of voyeuristic, sexually explicit compositions. Moorman briefly appears in Kathy O'Dell's 1997

article, “Fluxus Feminus,” in reference to the Fluxus group’s exclusionary and excommunicative practices, to which Moorman fell victim. Annette Kubitza similarly provides a cursory mention of Moorman’s *Opera Sextronique* performance and arrest in a discussion of governmental censorship in her 2002 article, “Fluxus, Flirt, Feminist? Carolee Schneemann, Sexual Liberation, and the Avant-garde of the 1960s.” In centralizing Moorman’s life and work as immutable forces in the development of the musical American avant-garde, this dissertation seeks, in part, to rectify the literature’s de-emphasis and omission of the artist’s contributions.

This project would not have been made possible without the crucial scholarship of feminist musicologists Susan McClary, Suzanne Cusick, Sally Macarthur, Carolyn Abbate, and Marcia Citron; as well as philosopher Robin James. Their writings on cultural issues as they intersect with music’s conception, performance, and reception, and their perspectives on an intersectional feminist approach to music criticism, substantially informed my work here. In particular, I have called upon McClary’s and Abbate’s criticisms of musicology’s disembodied approach;[6] McClary’s analyses of music as a gendered discourse;[7] Cusick’s theory of music’s “Mind/Body problem;”[8] Macarthur’s perception of feminist musicology’s impact in the field;[9] Citron’s outlook on what a third- or fourth-wave feminist musicology might entail;[10] and

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[6] Susan McClary, “Music, the Pythagoreans, and the Body,” in *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 82-104; Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” in *Cultural Critique* 12, no. 1, (Spring 1989), 57-81; Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004), 505-536.

[7] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991

[8] Suzanne G. Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1, (Winter 1994), 8-27; Suzanne Cusick, “Gender, Musicology, and Feminism,” in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-498.

[9] Sally Macarthur, *Toward a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

[10] Marcia Citron, “Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research,” *Women and New Music: A Journal of Culture* 8, no. 1 (2004), 47-60.

James's survey on twenty-first century feminist musicological scholarship[11] to formulate and describe my own perspective of Moorman's performance practice within the contexts of a current feminist musicological framework.

Furthermore, music philosopher Lydia Goehr's writings on political music and the politics of music in the context of Hanns Eisler's compositions informed my discussion of Moorman's work as both political and politicized.[12] Finally, although this dissertation does not engage directly with their work, Elisabeth Le Guin's musical analysis of Boccherini's music through an embodied, performer-centered approach,[13] and James Q. Davies's similar method in his writing about the physical cultivation and manipulation of pianists' hands and singers' voices throughout music history, have brought the idea of a "carnal musicology" into current discourse.[14] These texts influenced the structuring of this dissertation around the varying philosophies and implications of the body in musical performance—hence the chapter titles: "On Becoming a Body of Work," "The Absent Body," and "The Disobedient Body."

Chapter Summary

Rather than a chronological retelling of Moorman's life and work, this dissertation organizes an analysis of her musical practice thematically as it pertains to issues of embodiment, theatricality, nudity, sexuality, and gendered politics in its performance and reception. Looking ahead, Chapter 2, "On Becoming a Body of Work," describes the ways in which Moorman's body became synonymous with and inseparable from the works she performed. The first of four

[11] Robin James, "Music and Feminism in the 21st Century," *Music Research Annual* 1, 1-25.

[12] Lydia Goehr, "Political Music and the Politics of Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 99-112.

[13] Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[14] James Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

sections in this chapter details Moorman's early life and her progression from Juilliard to the avant-garde as it occurred through a series of chance meetings and fortuitous circumstances. In the following section, I describe her work on John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* as foundational to the remainder of her practice, detailing the ways in which she imparted theatricality to her interpretation of the open-ended score. In the third section, titled "I'm a cellist, and I must always bear that in mind," I examine how Moorman's repertoire evolved, from her early interactions with the Cage piece, to include experimental works that challenged musical traditions in myriad ways, and how she remained steadfast in her identity as a cellist as her practice took a theatrical turn. The final section of this chapter, "The Fluidity of Instruments and Identities," suggests that her practice was not just theatrical, but embodied. Here, I explore themes of subjectivity/objectivity, agency, and the fluid nature of Moorman's relationship to her instrument(s) as extensions of her self to describe her artistic approach as a radical and intersubjective one in which her body itself was integral to the work.

Chapter 3, "The Absent Body," explores the pervasive avant-garde philosophies of music as autonomous and disembodied to describe how Moorman's practice, as one that had become inseparable from her body, problematized notions of what was considered acceptable in music at the time. The first and second sections of this chapter detail two dichotomous approaches to avant-garde music as represented by Arnold Schoenberg (and his contemporaries) and John Cage to suggest that, between them, Moorman's work emerges as a subversive third alternative. In the third section, I return to Moorman's engagement with Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* to further explore how her work was not just theatrical but embodied, and not just embodied, but sexual/sexualized and political/politicized. In the final section, calling on the work of Susan McClary and Lydia Goehr, I discuss music's historical denial of the sexual and political to

suggest that it was the very nature of Moorman's practice as embodied, within the cultural landscape of the 1960s in which a woman's body and female sexuality were politicized, that led to her preclusion from serious consideration in the written histories of the avant-garde. In providing a new analysis of her work that engages with, rather than denies, its cultural and sociopolitical contexts, I contend that Moorman's work—although at odds with the then-existing systems of musical analysis and critique—may currently be viewed as powerful because of the critique it made of the aesthetic movement in which she worked.

Chapter 4, "The Disobedient Body," furthers this current reading of Moorman's practice through a feminist lens. In the first section, "The Tools One is Expected to Use," I describe elements of Moorman's personal and professional life for how they rejected the roles and expectations cast upon her by her patriarchal society. The second section provides a brief history of feminism and feminist musicology, describing the ways in which feminist musicology has responded to, imitated, and diverted from mainstream feminism. Finally, in "A Reframing Beyond Binarisms," I engage with Suzanne Cusick's feminist musicological work to describe Moorman's practice as simultaneously illuminated by and problematic to a second-wave feminist musicological approach, and I offer a current feminist analysis of Moorman's oeuvre which embraces its intersectional complexities. Whereas in Chapter 3, I find the frameworks of feminist musicologists working in the 1990s useful in elucidating aspects of Moorman's work, here, I suggest that these frameworks do indeed fall short in accounting for the nuances and complexities of her embodied performance practice; and I provide a new analysis, utilizing a current feminist approach which builds upon these frameworks yet transcends the imperative to dissolve traditional musicological binarisms.

In Chapter 5, I synthesize the preceding analyses to suggest that, together, they offer a

reframing of her practice as in fact foundational to the development of the musical avant-garde. Further, I posit that the issues raised by Moorman's practice, including the dynamics of corporeality, the feminine body, female nudity and sexuality, and the gendered politics of dominance and submission within musical performance provide a structure for evaluating and reevaluating notions of embodiment beyond Moorman's work, beyond the avant-garde, and beyond the scope of this particular project to include embodied issues of race, class, geography, and non-heteronormative variances in gender and sexual orientation.

CHAPTER 2

ON BECOMING A BODY OF WORK

A Logical Progression

At the height of her career, cellist Charlotte Moorman (1933–1991) was a central figure in the postwar American avant-garde, acting as a performer, collaborator, composer, administrator, and muse. She premiered and performed works by some of the genre's most esteemed composers, including John Cage, Earle Brown, Guiseppe Chiari, Morton Feldman, and Karlheinz Stockhausen; and her collaborations with classical-pianist-turned-video-artist Nam June Paik helped to establish a performance practice that was innovative and experimental in ways that tested the limits of what it meant to be a musician in the twentieth century. Alongside her own practice, Moorman championed the promotion of hundreds of other avant-garde artists and composers in organizing and producing fifteen of her New York Avant Garde Festivals between 1963 and 1980, the feat for which she is most widely acknowledged. Her prominence as a venerable leader at the forefront of the experimental avant-garde seems, at first glance, a far cry from Moorman's mostly conventional upbringing in Little Rock, Arkansas. The following paragraphs, though, describe Moorman's transformation from Little Rock's beauty queen to Queen of the Avant-Garde as a logical progression—a series of chance meetings and fortuitous circumstances coupled with her Southern grit and an unbridled ambition.[15]

Madeline Charlotte Moorman was born to her parents Jerry and Vivian Moorman, a salesman and an accountant, respectively, in 1933. As they both worked outside of the home,

[15] As Yoko Ono remembers her: "Charlotte had become a very important person in the avant-garde by starting a thing called the Avant-Garde Festival. Whenever I visited her, there were always a few very good-looking men, sitting there, waiting for the Queen to recognize them. They were all artists who wanted to be in the avant-garde festival." Yoko Ono, foreword to *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman,* by Joan Rothfuss (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), x.

Charlotte was looked after mostly by her maternal grandmother, Lillie Edna Kelly. When Charlotte was twelve years old, her father died at the Arkansas state sanatorium where he was being treated for tuberculosis. Following Jerry's death, Charlotte, her mother, and her grandmother moved into a house together, and Charlotte soon thereafter attended Little Rock High School. She participated in a number of extracurricular activities, including playing cello in the Arkansas State Symphony as a student apprentice, and her devotion to practicing the instrument intensified as her father passed away and her mother's alcoholism worsened.[16]

Upon her high school graduation, Moorman enrolled concurrently at Little Rock Junior College and Arkansas State Teachers College, taking courses in music theory, music literature, and choir in addition to cello lessons. One year later, she transferred to Centenary College and earned a Bachelor of Music degree. From Centenary, Moorman continued her studies with Horace Britt as a master's student at the University of Texas at Austin, and it was there where she first encountered the famed cellist and pedagogue Leonard Rose, who was in town for a performance of Dvorak's B Minor cello concerto. Moorman was captivated by his playing, and as Rothfuss describes it, she "decided on the spot that she had to study with Rose," which was "both impulsive and audacious," given the high demand for spots in his studios at Juilliard and the Curtis Institute of Music.[17] Her impulsivity paid off: having approached Rose after his concert that night, Moorman left with an invitation to attend the prestigious Meadowmount summer music camp, and her efforts that summer earned her one of those coveted studio spots at Juilliard for the following year, in the fall of 1957.

While at Juilliard, Moorman became a member of Jacob Blick's Boccherini Players, and

[16] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 11-20.

[17] Ibid., 27-28.

she was a member of the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski—two endeavors which would certainly have lent themselves well toward establishing her career as a concert cellist.[18] Perhaps most consequentially, though, was Moorman's meeting Kenji Kobayashi, a violinist and classmate of hers at Juilliard. Kobayashi was well-connected within the city's experimental music scene and spent a great deal of time with the composer Toshi Ichiyanagi, who was, at the time, married to Yoko Ono.[19] In helping Kobayashi put on his 1961 debut recital at New York's Town Hall, Moorman met Ono, and her world changed: after attending one of Ono's famous loft concerts on Chamber Street, Moorman remarked, "Not knowing what the hell I'd just listened to, [the performers'] dedication and seriousness made quite an impression on me."[20]

Through Kobayashi, Ichiyanagi, and Ono, Rothfuss writes, "Moorman got a brief education in the avant-garde and an entrée into a vibrant and diverse community of artists and composers."[21] Over the next several months, Moorman would work with Norman Seaman, a "niche impresario" and "filler of concert halls' odd hours"[22] to produce successful recitals featuring the works of some of these artists and composers, including Joseph Byrd, Richard Maxfield, and La Monte Young, in addition to Ichiyanagi and Ono.[23] In the years that followed,

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[18] Glenn Collins, "Charlotte Moorman, 58, Is Dead: A Cellist in Avant-Garde Works," *New York Times,* November 9, 1991, accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/09/arts/charlotte-moorman-58-is-dead-a-cellist-in-avant-garde-works.html.

[19] Holland Cotter, "Charlotte Moorman, Tradition Disrupter, Is the Focus of Two Shows," *New York Times*, September 8, 2016, accessed November 30, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/09/arts/design/charlotte-moorman-tradition-disrupter-is-the-focus-of-two-shows.html.

[20] Barbara Moore, "Charlotte Moorman: Eroticello Variations," *Ear Magazine* (May 1987): 18, quoted in Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman," in *Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology,* ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), unpaginated.

[21] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 48.

[22] Bruce Weber, "Norman Seaman, Filler of Concert Halls' Odd Hours, Dies at 86," *New York Times*, September 12, 2009, accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/nyregion/13seaman.html.

[23] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 49.

Moorman's interest in the experimental avant-garde evolved into an unrelenting calling, her passion for new music eventually eclipsing her dedication to the classical tradition. Charismatic and tenacious, Moorman derived from these early encounters an entirely new perspective, and she wielded her ambition and charm to craft a new world for herself and for those around her.

Even in the earliest days of her career, Moorman had a reputation for procuring a loyal following: as Rothfuss notes, one of Moorman's Centenary College classmates remembered her as someone who "could be troublesome" and "always had too many irons in the fire," but recalled that her network of (mostly male) colleagues were always at the ready to lend Moorman money, give her rides, type her term papers, or "otherwise help manage her life."[24] This aspect of her personality would prove itself instrumental in her later endeavors. The fifteen avant-garde festivals Moorman organized and managed were affairs of great magnitude, combining elements of visual art, film, literature, music, and theatre in venues suited for thousands of attendees; and she used her powers of persuasion to navigate the many challenges presented by the size and complexity of such undertakings. For the tenth annual festival, held at New York's Grand Central Terminal, Moorman visited Sig Frigand, then the director of public affairs at the Metropolitan Transit Authority, seeking a permit for the event. Of their meeting, Frigand recalled, "Charlotte was so charming, with her Southern drawl. [...] She exuded an energy. She flirted. [...] It was kind of an act. Her accent would fade and come back as she needed it to. You knew you were being manipulated, but you didn't care."[25] More than manipulative, Moorman put her compelling persona to work in building and fortifying a network of artists, musicians, and composers—one that would ultimately shape the landscape of the postwar avant-garde.

[24] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 22.

[25] Sig Frigand, interview with Joan Rothfuss, May 3, 2005, quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 308.

Carolee Schneeman acknowledged Moorman's synergistic role, writing to her in 1980, "This I always felt was one of your particular gifts—and one which has never been sufficiently appreciated: to establish a community, to have given us all a focused *communality*, an equity in which we shared, participated, developed a body of MUTUAL concerns, aesthetically, personally, through collaboration with you/the arena you made possible."[26] Indeed, her impact on this community, and on the aesthetic development of the musical avant-garde, was consequential, her sought-after approach to performance lending itself to the creation of new works by some of the avant-garde's most highly regarded artists and composers.

Here, I want to return to the idea that Moorman's position of avant-garde influence was not so much a radical departure from her upbringing and her classical training as it was a serendipitous evolution. Were it not for Leonard Rose being on tour that March of 1957, Moorman likely would not have had the chance to attend Juilliard. Were it not for her timely encounter with Kenji Kobayashi, or for Kobayashi's relationship with Ichiyanagi, or for Ichiyanagi's marriage to Yoko Ono, she might not have come upon the budding experimental music scene of the late 1950s. Had she not grown up in a household of women, including her grandmother Lillie Edna (whom Moorman would later describe as her "favorite parent," her "everything"),[27] she might not have developed the same sense of self-assuredness that drove her artistic success. Truly, were it not for this lucky collision of Moorman's personality and a series of opportune encounters, she might have unwittingly settled for another life. In the sections that follow, I describe how elements of her work similarly evolved through a serendipitous and logical progression, from her earliest avant-garde performances to those that became evermore

[26] Carolee Schneeman to Charlotte Moorman, September 26, 1980. Emphasis in the original. CMA.

[27] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 12.

daring (and often, dangerous), to establish a performance practice that was inseparable from her body.

26'1.1499" for a String Player

One of the first pieces Moorman encountered as she made her way into the avant-garde scene was John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* ([1955], 1960) for solo cello. As with every piece of his composed after 1951, Cage used chance procedures to complete the indeterminate work;[28] though, even with the various freedoms inherent in indeterminate music, the massive, 85-page score is filled with musical, technical, temporal, and interpretive demands of the performer. *26'1.1499"* became a hallmark work for Moorman, and she kept it in her repertoire for more than two decades.

"Hit Paik!," "cat in heat," and "shoot gun" are just three of the dozens, if not hundreds, of instructions Moorman added to her copy of *26'1*;[29] and these additions, however individualized, were a necessary component of the work. In the printed score, Cage instructs performers to include noncello sounds as part of the performance:

> The lowest area is devoted to noises on the box, sounds other than those produced on the strings. These may issue entirely from other sources, e.g. percussion instruments, whistles, radios, etc. Only high and low are indicated.[30]

The "lowest area" references the bottom section of each page, whereas the top sections, somewhat resembling staves, are reserved for various other performance directives. These other instructions include the observance of spatial notation, wherein space is equal to time; double,

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[28] Though sometimes used interchangeably, James Pritchett provides the following distinction between "chance" and "indeterminate" music: chance "refers to the use of some sort of random procedure in the act of composition," while indeterminacy "refers to the ability of a piece to be performed in substantially different ways." James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108.

[29] John Cage, *26.1'1499" for a String Player* (New York: Henmar Press, 1960), copy of Moorman's score in CMA.

[30] Ibid.

triple, and quadruple stops, along with pizzicatos, in standard notation; and graphically notated indications of varied bow pressure and vibrato speed/depth. Shorthand symbols are used to indicate *sul tasto, ponticello,* and the like; conventional symbols indicate up and down bows. There is a separate line for each string of the instrument, with graphic depictions of where on the instrument the performer should play. "If no indication is given, the player is free to break as he chooses," Cage writes, though, to honor each of the instructions without sacrificing temporal accuracy is an enormous challenge.

When adhering to the spatial notation provided, there are several pages which last only five seconds, and the amount of work to be done within that short time frame is dizzying, not to mention the need for swift and seemingly constant page turns. Moorman recognized the challenge before her and took care to dutifully prepare. "After living with the Cage 'Piece for a String Player' intensely for the past two weeks, I'm convinced that Cage is a genius," she wrote in a letter to David Tudor. "I've gone without a lot of sleep (without pills) and I get more and more excited about this piece...I have checked and rewritten passages in every conceivable way (traditional notations etc.) to find that his way is better. If I can just transmit my enthusiasm, awe and love for this piece to the audience."[31]

Moorman planned to premier the piece on her solo debut recital on April 15, 1963, at Philip Corner's Lower East Side loft.[32] Assisting her on this recital were Joseph Byrd, Jacob Glick, Max Neuhaus, and pianist David Tudor—a group Joan Rothfuss regards as "New Music stalwarts" whose presence made clear that "Moorman had not only dared to enter a new world of

[31] Charlotte Moorman to David Tudor, undated, Charlotte Moorman Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library, Evanston, IL (CMA).

[32] Concert flyer in CMA.

sound, [but that] she had leapt in head first."[33] But in preparing *26'1* and realizing its difficulty, Moorman opted to perform a shorter segment from the work instead. Cage allowed for cuts to the score, instructing performers to change the title of the abridged work accordingly. "I have the Cage piece," Moorman wrote to Tudor. "It is extremely difficult and I will need as much time as I can possibly get."[34] Moorman opted to prepare the first three segments of the piece, totaling 11 minutes, but ultimately she had time to prepare only three minutes of the work. The resulting title for her premiere performance was *162.06" for a String Player.*

Despite her conscientious preparation, Moorman viewed her performance that night as an utter failure. She wrote once more to David Tudor, shortly after the concert:

> You played so beautifully Tuesday evening. I am sorry that I played so badly. John Cage's piece is one of my favorite compositions in the entire literature—it really hurts that I ruined it. I never thought that I would recover from my bad performance, but fortunately I've gotten some rest and I am playing it like I wanted to that night. My mind is functioning and is connected to my body once again. I am between 3-4 minutes overtime and once I was only 1 minute over—using the indicated parts of my bow + following the dynamics. I only hope I will have another chance some day to play this beautiful piece with you.[35]

Having so recovered, Moorman kept the piece in her repertoire for several years, continuously adding to and honing her interpretation. The surviving copy of the score is filled with taped-on additions ranging from Tampax instructions to magazine ads ("Can it be true? Panties more comfortable than wearing nothing!") to full newspaper articles about Watergate and Nixon's war on drugs [Fig. 2.1]. Nestled in the very back of the score is a categorized list of tape recorded extra-musical sounds Moorman kept for use at her disposal:

Life Sounds Garbage truck in operation

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[33] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 60.

[34] Charlotte Moorman to David Tudor, undated, CMA.

[35] Charlotte Moorman to David Tudor, June 3, 1963, David Tudor Papers at the Getty Research Institute (980039), as quoted in Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011), 151.

	Subway screeching (IRT West side)
	Ice cream truck
	Long Island train before departure
City Sounds	Recording buzzer
	Joseph's buzzer
	Telephone busy signal
	Porsche horn—Earle's
	Queen Mary leaving (a big boat)
	Tug boat?
	Cab horn
	Debris falling or being thrown on my landing
	Car screeching to a stop
Animal Sounds	Wasps
	Cat in heat (female Siamese)
	Cats copulating
	Birds—George's
	Zoo: lions, monkeys
[Untitled]	Sculptor cutting stone—working with metal
	Church chimes Charles
	Wood burning
	Beer can opening/champagne opening
	Bat hitting baseball
	Telephone ringing (in very dense place)
People Sounds	Voice (mine, etc.), spoken, singing etc.
	Fighting (brawl)
	Cantor chanting
	Orgasms
	Loud/soft voices in anger and/or happiness
	Laughs
	Crying—new born baby's first cry
	Hiccups?
	Foreign languages, accents
	Single words
	Singing tones
	Flatulent lady
Water Sounds	Ocean
	Shower
	Toilet
	Faucet
	Natural spring
	Rain, on car top, on umbrella top
Untitled	Needle scraping a turntable
	Rubber popping
	Percussion instruments:?

Glass bottles
Electronic sounds: radio sounds, static, dentist drill[36]

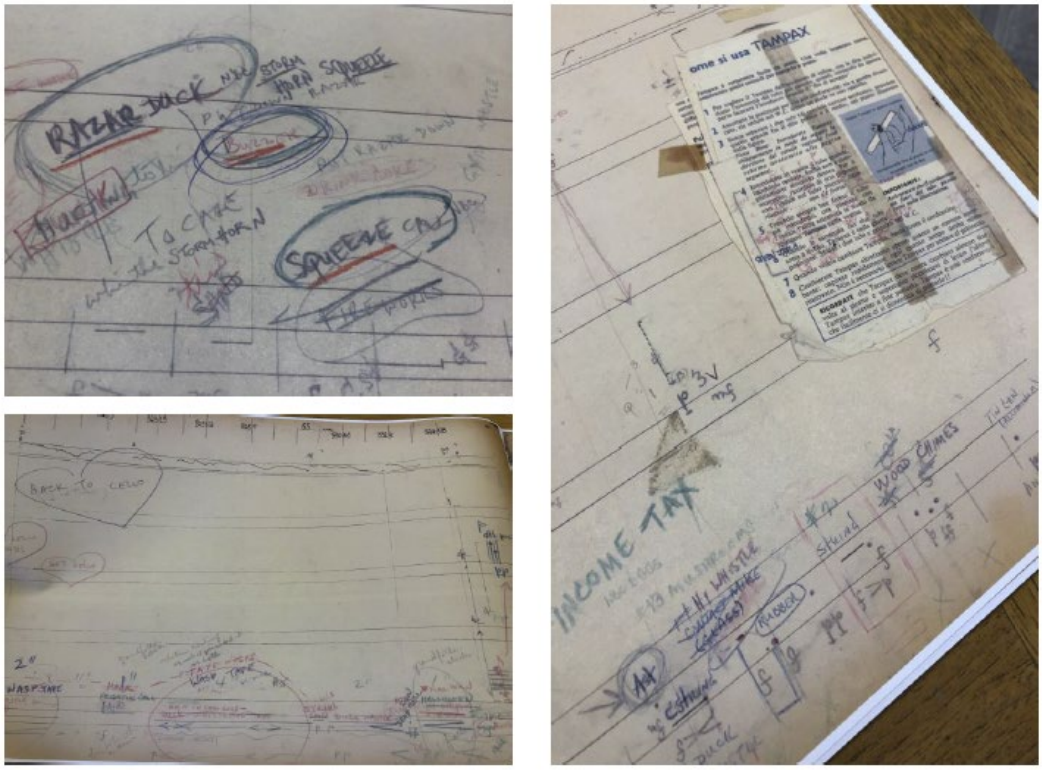

Figure 2.1: Details of Charlotte Moorman's copy of John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, Charlotte Moorman Archives (CMA), Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

Certainly, Moorman made the piece her own, her interpretation becoming even more florid and unwieldy in the early years of her collaborative relationship with Nam June Paik. *26'1* became a spectacle involving Moorman cooking eggs or mushrooms in an electric frying pan, shredding dollar bills in a blender, breaking glass, and playing a "human cello," wherein a shirtless Paik rested between Moorman's legs while she plucked and bowed a string held taut across his back. There were "bomb cellos" fashioned from military practice bombs, recitations of newspaper crime columns, and segments from a Planned Parenthood advertisement. In a nod to

[36] Details from Charlotte Moorman's copy of John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, Charlotte Moorman Archives (CMA), Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

Cage, Moorman also performed with a "throat mike." Piekut reminds us that Cage "had long been terrorizing audiences with thunderously loud amplified swallows of water" since 1966; Moorman, "[her] taste always aimed a bit lower," opted instead for the amplified sounds of herself enjoying a Coca-Cola and a hot dog.[37]

"The striking thing was to take this piece of mine and play it in a way that didn't have anything to do with the piece itself," Cage told scholar Gisela Gronemeyer. "I didn't like it at all. And my publisher said, the best thing that could happen for you, would be that Charlotte Moorman would die."[38] In another instance, Cage referred to *26'1* as "the one Charlotte Moorman has been murdering all along."[39] Given that the ever-growing list of sonic and visual theatricalities frequently occurred at the sacrifice of accurate timing, it is not surprising that Cage grew to detest Moorman's interpretation. The score allows for flexibility of pitch, timbre, dynamics, nonmusical sound, and even pre-planned abridgement; but the core challenge of the work, as indicated by its title, is temporal precision.

Clearly, Moorman concerned herself with adhering to its duration, having expressed to David Tudor her regret for "ruining" the premiere of the piece and describing her attempts to regain control of its timing. "In the Cage piece," Moorman explained on a separate occasion, doubling down on her seriousness in adhering to the score, "where he's written the string part and then all these other sounds, if I don't do it at the right point with a stopwatch, then it's like adding a beat to the Boccherini."[40] It is surely plausible to conclude that Cage's dissatisfaction

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[37] Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise,* 156.

[38] Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication," unpaginated.

[39] John Cage to Berttram Turetzky, October 29, 1967, John Cage Collection, Northwestern University Library, as cited in Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 149.

[40] Howard Weinberg and Nam June Paik, "'Topless Cellist' Charlotte Moorman" YouTube video, 29:21, posted August 12, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aeH9FdtAqY&t=31s.

with Moorman's performances of *26'1* stemmed from this area of concern, but, as Peikut asks, "what about this oversized theatricality?"[41]

"I'm a cellist, and I must always bear that in mind"

Theatricality was certainly a thematic pillar in Moorman's work. A few months after her debut recital, she professed: "These composers have opened up a vast new sound world for the performer. It is so vast that one hardly dares to enter it." And Moorman did dare to enter it, leaping headfirst. "I find in this music a sensuous, emotional, aesthetic, and almost mystical power," she said, "which can be overwhelming."[42] In the years that followed, Moorman's repertoire expanded to include experimental works that challenged musical traditions in myriad ways, crafting a repertoire that "fell far outside the limits of what people called music."[43] Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* remained a staple in her oeuvre.

Moorman's early performances included several works by well-respected composers. On her debut recital, in addition to the Cage piece, she played Morton Feldman's graphically notated *Projection I* (1950), Barney Childs's aleatoric *Interbalances III* (1962), Joseph Byrd's semi-improvisatory *Loops and Sequences* (c. 1950), and Earle Brown's *Music for Cello and Piano* (1955), in which pitches and dynamics are fixed, but time is fluid (a compositional method in near opposition to Cage's *26'1*).[44] Months later, Moorman further established herself within and beyond this coterie as she embarked on her first large-scale performance event—6 Concerts '63—which became the first of fifteen annual avant-garde festivals she organized. The six concerts presented works by Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Karlheinz

[41] Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise,* 163.

[42] Charlotte Moorman, introduction to the WBAI broadcast of *6 Concerts '63*, undated handwritten notes, CMA.

[43] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 2.

[44] Program for this recital is in the CMA.

Stockhausen, James Tenney, and Iannis Xanakis, among others; with performances offered by Moorman, Earle Brown, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Max Neuhaus, Frederic Rzewski, David Tudor, and Nicholas Zumbro. Moorman's engagement with this extensive network provided access to a world of avant-garde innovation, and in time, she became respected as an interpreter, performer, and dedicatee of new music.

Later in the 1960s and into the 1970s, nearly all of the works Moorman performed involved some form of visual spectacle. Jim McWilliams wrote several pieces for Moorman which blurred the boundaries between music and theatre: there was *Sky Kiss* (1968), in which Moorman played the cello while suspended by helium balloons floating down Central Park West [Fig. 2.2; Fig 2.3]; *The Ultimate Easter Bunny* (1973), later retitled *Candy*, where Moorman sat on a bed of cellophane grass, nude and holding a student cello, while participants slathered her and the instrument with twenty pounds of chocolate [Fig. 2.4; Fig. 2.5]; *Flying Cello* (1974), a "musical trapeze act" where Moorman and her cello are suspended separately, 40 feet above ground, creating sounds when they meet in mid-air; and *Ice Music* (1972), in which a nude Moorman performed on a cello sculpted from a block of ice until it melted away [Fig. 2.6].

In a video clip of a 1983 performance, Moorman performs Guiseppe Chiari's *Per Arco* (1964), which was written for her. The performance opens with an audio recording of sounds from World War II: machine gun fire, tanks, rifles, exploding bombs. After a brief silence, Moorman responds to the sounds she has just heard, caressing her cello as if to soothe it, then suddenly and violently slamming her bow against the body of the instrument before dissolving into tears [Fig 2.7].[45]

[45] Video tape is in the CMA, and was on display at the *Feast of Astonishments* exhibition, viewed on December 7, 2016, Grey Art Gallery at New York University.

Figure 2.2: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *Sky Kiss* (1968), Sydney, Australia, 1976.

Figure 2.3: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *Sky Kiss* (1968), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981.

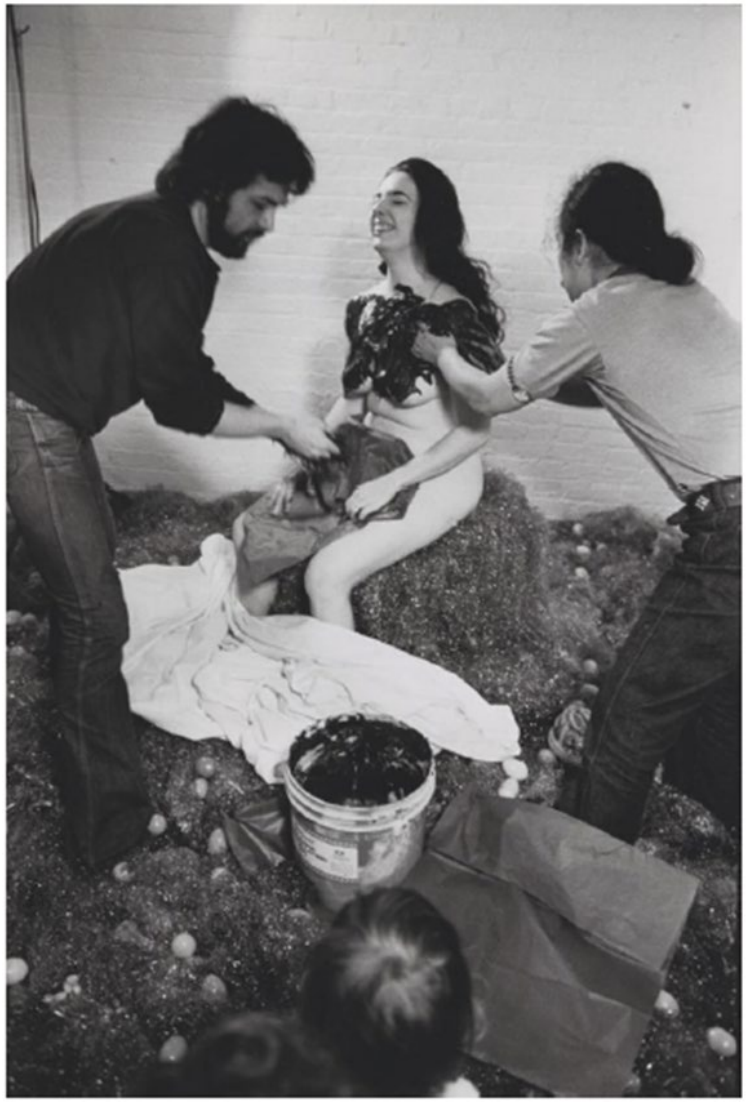

Figure 2.4: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *Candy (The Ultimate Easter Bunny)* (1973), New York City, 1973. Photo: Peter Moore. Courtesy MOMA PS1 Archives.

Figure 2.5: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *Candy (The Ultimate Easter Bunny)* (1973), Art Gallery of New South Wales, 5th Kaldor Public Art Project, Sydney, Australia, 1976.

Figure 2.6: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *Ice Music for Sydney*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 5th Kaldor Public Art Project, Sydney, Australia, 1976.

Figure 2.7: Charlotte Moorman performing Guiseppe Chiari's *Per Arco* (1964), Italy, 1983. Photo: Mario Parolin.

Figure 2.8: Charlotte Moorman with Nam June Paik, performing Joseph Beuys's *Infiltration Homogen for Cello*, Guadalcanal, 1976. Photo: Frank Pileggi.

Thematically similar is Joseph Beuys's *Infiltration Homogen for Cello* (1966), in which Moorman wraps her cello in gray felt adorned with a large red cross—the international symbol of emergency [Fig. 2.8]. This is the only piece Beuys ever made for an artist other than himself, which perhaps speaks to the power Moorman had as a respected interpreter and performer within various and overlapping avant-garde circles.

Of all the artists and composers with whom Moorman would collaborate, the most consequential by far was Nam June Paik, the Korean-born, German-trained artist and composer internationally recognized as the "Father of Video Art."[46] The story of how Moorman met Paik is best relayed in Moorman's own words. Describing a conversation she had with Karlheinz

[46] The origin of this appellation is likely Calvin Tompkins's 1975 profile of the artist for *The New Yorker*, in which the author refers to Paik as the "George Washington of Video Art." Calvin Tomkins, "Profile: Video Visionary," *The New Yorker* (May 5, 1975), accessed August 21, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1975/05/05/video-visionary.

Stockhausen while planning the second annual avant-garde festival, Moorman recalled:

> [I] said, "I want to do the *Originale*, the theater piece." And he said, "Well, I did that for certain people. I did that for Hans Helm." I said, "Well, we've got Allen Ginsberg here, the poet." He said, "Well, you need Caspari, the director." I said "We have Allen Kaprow, who invented the Happening more or less. What better director do you have than that?" He said, "Well, you have to have Paik." And I said, "What's a Paik?"[47]

This comedic misapprehension in which Moorman confused Paik's personhood with objecthood foreshadowed a theme that would run through many of their collaborations to come. As her story goes, Paik had landed in New York City from Germany on that very same day, and having heard from Fluxus artist Alison Knowles that Moorman was interested in staging *Originale*, he contacted Moorman via her hotel room telephone to talk about coordinating the performance. Their work together on the resulting five-night run of *Originale* in New York's Judson Hall activated a partnership between Moorman and Paik that would prove significantly impactful as a formative influence within the complex networks of the avant-garde.

Paik's interest in the developing avant-garde flourished when he moved to Germany in 1956, meeting John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Cage's student and founder of Fluxus, George Maciunas. His 1964 move to New York City came on the heels of his first solo exhibition, "The Exposition of Electronic Music-Electronic Television" in Wuppertal, West Germany, in which he essentially created a new genre of art in being the first person to use video as an artistic medium.[48] "The real issue" Paik proclaimed, "is not to make another scientific toy, but how to *humanize* the technology and the electronic medium."[49] Just as Paik sought to expand

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[47] Fred Sterne, "'The Originale' Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik by Fred Stern," YouTube video, 10:55, posted October 19, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yzzAopn9TE.

[48] *Encyclopedia Britannica Online,* s.v. "Nam June Paik," accessed August 18, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nam-June-Paik.

[49] Nam June Paik, "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," in *TV as a Creative Medium* (New York: Howard Wise Gallery, 1969), exhibition flyer, accessed August 18, 2020, https://monoskop.org/images/4/4a/TV_as_a_Creative_Medium_1969.pdf. Emphasis in the original. Paik later characterized this phrase as a silly oversimplification: "Although it was corny, I used the phrase 'how to humanize

the bounds of the technological medium, so too did he strive to emancipate concert music from what he regarded as an uptight medium by way of introducing sex to classical music.[50]

In Moorman, Paik found a joyfully willing participant for such endeavors. One of first pieces Paik imagined for Moorman, *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* (1964) became a staple in her repertoire. The work begins with Moorman playing *The Swan*, the well-known fifth movement from Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* (1886), stopping abruptly after the first few measures, setting down her cello, walking over to a large oil drum filled with water, and submerging herself, feet first, before climbing out of the water and finishing the movement while soaking wet. Sometimes, Moorman wore a full-length concert gown for the performance; sometimes she was wrapped in clear cellophane [Fig. 2.9]. In a similar yet more voyeuristic vein, Paik's *Pop Sonata* (later renamed *Sonata for Adults Only*) (1965) instructs Moorman to play a few measures of J.S. Bach's Suite No. 3 for solo cello, remove a piece of clothing, and repeat several times [Fig 2.10]. The work ends with Moorman, having stripped down to her underwear, lying on the floor, her cello atop her, finishing the piece.

There was Paik's *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), in which Moorman played the cello, topless, with two small television sets worn on her breasts [Fig. 2.11]; his *TV Bed* (1972), where she performed while laying across a collection of large TV monitors nestled between a headboard and footboard [Fig. 2.12]; and the *Concerto for TV Cello* (1971) [Fig. 2.13], featuring Moorman playing a "cello" fashioned from three differently sized TVs attached to a cello bridge, tailpiece and strings.

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technology' in the press release of the Howard Wise Gallery in 1969. I thought it was very corny. But, for some reason, everybody quoted it and even now they keep quoting it, twenty years after!" Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Nam June Paik: An Interview," *Visible Language* 29, no. 2 (1995), 129.

[50] As Rothfuss notes, sex had been a "not-uncommon theme in classical music and ballet for at least a century"; Paik took issue with its presentation as pure artifice; so he sought present "the real thing: the nude body as sensual *musique concrète.*" Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 88.

Figure 2.9: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* (1965) at *24 Stunden*, Wuppertal, West Germany, 1965. Photo: Ute Klophaus.

Figure 2.10: Charlotte Moorman performs Nam June Paik's *Pop Sonata (Sonata for Adults Only)* (1965).

Figure 2.11: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *TV Bra for Living Sculpture (*1969), Art Gallery of New South Wales, 5th Kaldor Public Art Project, Sydney, Australia, 1976. Photo: Kerry Dundas.

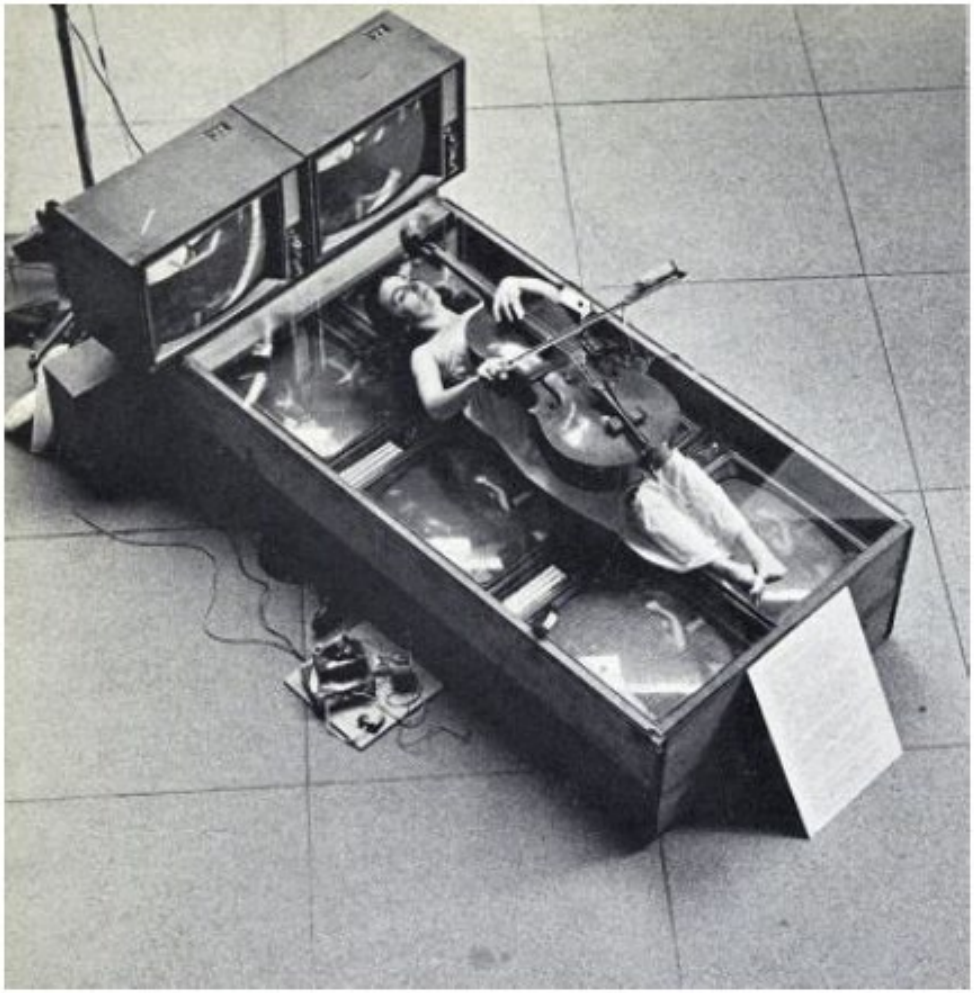

Figure 2.12: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *TV Bed* (1972), Mercer Arts Center, New York, 1972.

Figure 2.13: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *Concerto for TV Cello* (1971), Galeria Bonino, New York, 1971. Photo: Takahiko Iimura.

Figure 2.14: Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik performing *Human Cello* as part of John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, Café au Go Go, October 4, 1965.

Figure 2.15: Charlotte Moorman (with Nam June Paik) preparing for a performance of Nam June Paik's *Opera Sextronique* (1967), New York, 1967. Photo: Hy Rothman.

Of course, *Human Cello* (1965) [Fig. 2.14] was created by Moorman and Paik as a subsection of Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*. Their most notable collaboration was Paik's *Opera Sextronique* (1967) [Fig. 2.15], the piece which earned Moorman notoriety as the "Topless Cellist" following her arrest for indecent exposure during the work's premiere. "Come out topless," instructs the score, then later bottomless but in a football jersey and helmet, and ultimately, fully nude. Rothfuss remarks on its titling as an "opera" as appropriate insomuch as the 45-minute work was a large-scale production involving music, light, scenery, props, and movement.[51]

This compendious review of some of Moorman's most frequented collaborations demonstrates a theatrical, corporeal turn in her practice. It might have been easy to cast

[51] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 184.

Moorman's performances as some sort of lowbrow, sensationalist, thoughtless act; indeed, some of her critics did.[52] Her frequent appearances on late-night television shows, where she was often subtly mocked and presented as a novelty – "a poster girl for far-out artists' goofy stunts"[53] – did not help. Moorman herself, though, never left room for skepticism about her dedication to new music, nor the seriousness with which she approached it. In January 1965, following a performance at The New School, Moorman was deridingly asked why she had "gone along with the gag" in following Paik's instructions to undress during the performance. She replied: "I'm a serious musician...As an interpreter of serious music, I have to carry out what [the composer] writes down. It may seem like a joke to you, but it's actually quite difficult. It's hard enough to play serious music properly. It's even harder when you have to undress to it."[54] On another occasion, when asked by a journalist why she always performed with her cello even though she often did not play it, Moorman replied, "I'm a cellist, and I must always bear that in mind."[55]

This compendious review of some of Moorman's most frequented collaborations demonstrates a theatrical, corporeal turn in her practice. It might have been easy to cast Moorman's performances as some sort of lowbrow, sensationalist, thoughtless act; indeed, some of her critics did.[56] Her frequent appearances on late-night television shows, where she was often

[52] For a particularly scathing criticism of Moorman's work, see Alan Rich, "Miss Moorman's Thing, or: Nudity is No Cover," *New Yorker* (July 8, 1968): 50-51, CMA. For instances of criticism from fellow artists Carolee Schneeman, Martha Rosler, and others, see chapter 4.

[53] Edward M. Gómez, "Topless but Far From Helpless: Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Life," *Hyperallergic*, August 7, 2017, accessed June 11, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/175600/topless-but-far-from-helpless-charlotte-moormans-avant-garde-life.

[54] Charlotte Moorman in conversation with Jud Yalkut, 1971, as cited in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 112.

[55] Mike Scammel, "A Soviet View of Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde," Studio 180, No 924 (July 1970), as cited in Rothfuss, 235.

[56] For a particularly scathing criticism of Moorman's work, see Alan Rich, "Miss Moorman's Thing, or: Nudity is No Cover," *New Yorker* (July 8, 1968): 50-51, CMA. For instances of criticism from fellow artists Carolee Schneeman, Martha Rosler, and others, see chapter 4.

subtly mocked and presented as a novelty—"a poster girl for far-out artists' goofy stunts"[57]—did not help. Moorman herself, though, never left room for skepticism about her dedication to new music, nor the seriousness with which she approached it. In January of 1965, following a performance at The New School, Moorman was deridingly asked why she had "gone along with the gag" in following Paik's instructions to undress during the performance. She poignantly replied: "I'm a serious musician...As an interpreter of serious music, I have to carry out what [the composer] writes down. It may seem like a joke to you, but it's actually quite difficult. It's hard enough to play serious music properly. It's even harder when you have to undress to it."[58] On another occasion, when asked by a journalist why she always performed with her cello even though she often did not play it, Moorman replied, "I'm a cellist, and I must always bear that in mind."[59]

The Fluidity of Instruments and Identities

In describing Moorman's relationship with her cello(s), Kathy O'Dell invokes twentieth-century philosopher Rudolf Carnap's "semantical analysis of meaning," that is, "a new method for analyzing and describing the meanings of linguistic expression,"[60] which indeed enlightens a discussion of Moorman's complex coupling with her instrument.[61] At the core of Carnap's

[57] Edward M. Gómez, "Topless but Far From Helpless: Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Life," *Hyperallergic*, August 7, 2017, accessed June 11, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/175600/topless-but-far-from-helpless-charlotte-moormans-avant-garde-life.

[58] Charlotte Moorman in conversation with Jud Yalkut, 1971, as cited in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 112.

[59] Mike Scammel, "A Soviet View of Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde," Studio 180, No 924 (July 1970), as cited in Rothfuss, 235.

[60] Rudolf Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), v.

[61] Kathy O'Dell, "Bomb-Paper-Ice: Charlotte Moorman and the Metaphysics of Extension," in Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corinne Granof, eds., A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s–1980s. Evanston, IL: Block Museum of Art & Northwestern University Press, 2016, 152-167.

methodology is the distinction between "extension" and "intension:" the former refers to denotation; the latter, connotation. In other words, Carnap made clear that there is a difference between what a term *designates* (its extension) and what it *means* (its intension). An example provided in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy takes this concept out of the abstract with a tangible illustration:

> If you are not skilled in colloquial astronomy, and I tell you that the morning star is the evening star, I have given you information—your knowledge has changed. If I tell you the morning star is the morning star, you might feel I was wasting your time. Yet in both cases I have told you the planet Venus was self-identical...The two phrases, "morning star" and "evening star" may designate the same object, but they do not have the same meanings.[62]

Using Carnap's distinction as a foundation for analysis, Moorman's steadfast identification as a cellist gave meaning to her performance props and actions. "Ice" has its *denotation*, as does "cello;" and these two denotations exist wholly separate from one another—unless they are commingled in the *connotation* provided by Moorman's presence, as during a performance of McWilliams's *Ice Music* (1972). Similar associations are made of the "cellos" fashioned from military practice bombs, stacked television sets, and of Paik himself. In this way, Moorman's own insistence on her identity and presentation as a musician provided context for a practice that eventually evolved far beyond the accepted traditions for musical performance, in a way that allows for an interpretation of her performance work as "music," even when it lacked a traditional cello or a notated score. In the following paragraphs, I will further demonstrate Moorman's commitment to her musical identity, and explore how this phenomenon allowed for a subversive approach to performance wherein her body became synonymous to "the work" itself.

There were several instances where Moorman insisted upon her identity as "musician,"

[62] Melvin Fitting, "Intensional Logic," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified April 2, 2015, https://seop.illc.uva.nl/entries/logic-intensional/index.html.

her performance work as "music," and her role as "performer," persuasions which extended beyond simple utterances to the press. Throughout her career, she maintained the guise of a concert musician, with her formal evening gowns, perfectly coiffed hair, and a poise that rang with echoes of her former self as Little Rock's 1952 Miss City Beautiful. For decades, she held steadfast to her role as performer, rather than co-creator, of the pieces in her repertoire. In a 1965 program note, Moorman wrote: "I am an interpreter and not a composer and I can not write interesting sentences," and, "I'm a cellist and not a poet."[63] Her subscription to the division between composer and performer is evermore present in documents from the 1967 court proceedings following her arrest and subsequent conviction for indecent exposure during the premiere of Paik's *Opera Sextronique*. "Of course, each [of the performance elements] is an integral part of the composition; a part of the total structure, *indicated in the score by its creator*, Nam June Paik," Moorman professed. "These works should not be performed in clothing other than specified by Paik, since they would then be different compositions from those created by the composer—*such a censorship would constitute a compromise with artistic requirements*."[64] Her argument won at least some favor from the presiding judge: "The dress and props were all provided in the script," he wrote in his opinion. "She was bound by it. She obeyed it."[65]

Beneath the overt rationale in Moorman's statement to the judge is a subtextual nod to the centuries-old practice in which compositions, once notated, are considered complete works that may then be performed by any skilled-enough practitioner. Implied in her presented

[63] Charlotte Moorman, "Cello," in *24 Stunden*, ed. Joseph Beuys, n.p (Itehoe Vosskate: Hansen and Hansen, 1965). Reprinted in Bonomo, *Cello Anthology*, n.p.

[64] Charlotte Moorman, "An Artist in the Courtroom (People vs. Moorman)," in *Cello Anthology*, unpaginated. Emphasis in the original.

[65] Judge Milton Shalleck, "People v. Charlotte Moorman," *New York Law Journal,* May 11, 1967, 18. Although Shalleck's statement appeared to be in agreement with Moorman's perspective here, he ultimately shifted the accountability for her nudity onto the performer herself, rather than onto Paik, for whom the charges were dropped.

argument is the idea that any performer (at least, any performer who fits the requirements of the score—that is, a cellist who has breasts so as to represent a "live Greek female torso, semi-nude"[66]) should be able to deliver an authentic performance of this same piece.

On one hand, it is conceivable that several of the compositions in Moorman's repertoire would be transferable in such a way. Indeed, having had her eyes opened to this "vast new sound world" of the avant-garde as somewhat of a latecomer, Moorman's early performances did include works that had been in play for some time: Erik Satie's *Vexations* (1893), Earle Brown's *Music for Cello and Piano* (1955), Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Plus-Minus* (1963), and so on. In time, though, her practice became more personal, and more subversive, resulting in a body of work that disallowed authentic replication.

Most explicitly inimitable are the works written exclusively for Moorman, for instance, McWilliams's *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman* (1972) [Fig. 2.16]. Staged at the New York Aquarium as part of the 9th New York Avant Garde Festival, the piece featured Moorman in a wetsuit with intake and exhaust tubes for breathing, submerged with a student cello in a glass tank of water. Dramatically backlit by four stage lights, Moorman inaudibly plucked and bowed her instrument for five minutes before climbing back out. Even beyond its title, the work's dedication encapsulates an exceptionally personal significance: McWilliams wrote the piece after "observing Miss Moorman in the hospital after one of her major surgery pieces, with the plastic tubes and bottles and suction pumps artificially feeding and emptying her system."[67] There is a cursory similarity between Moorman's hospital feeding tubes and the breathing tubes in *Intravenous Feeding*, but for those who knew her, the symbolism was far

[66] Moorman, "An Artist in the Courtroom," unpaginated.

[67] Jim McWilliams, "The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman (A Deep Sea Event for Cerise Cello)," postcard advertising the performance, 1972, CMA.

deeper. In coping with the cancerous illness that would ultimately take her life, Moorman relied on performance as a life raft, her devotion to her work calling her away from the painful reality of biopsies, surgeries, and injections, toward an enrapturing sense of musical and aesthetic purpose. "If I know I'm performing, I'll be okay," Moorman told her friends.[68] Just as the feeding tubes in the hospital had kept Moorman alive, so too did the oxygen tank and its breathing tubes in McWilliams's piece; the latter serving purposes both literal and metaphorical. Certainly, another cellist could have performed the actions of the piece; but without Moorman, her cancer-stricken body, her intense and endless devotion to performance, *Intravenous Feeding* loses its meaning.

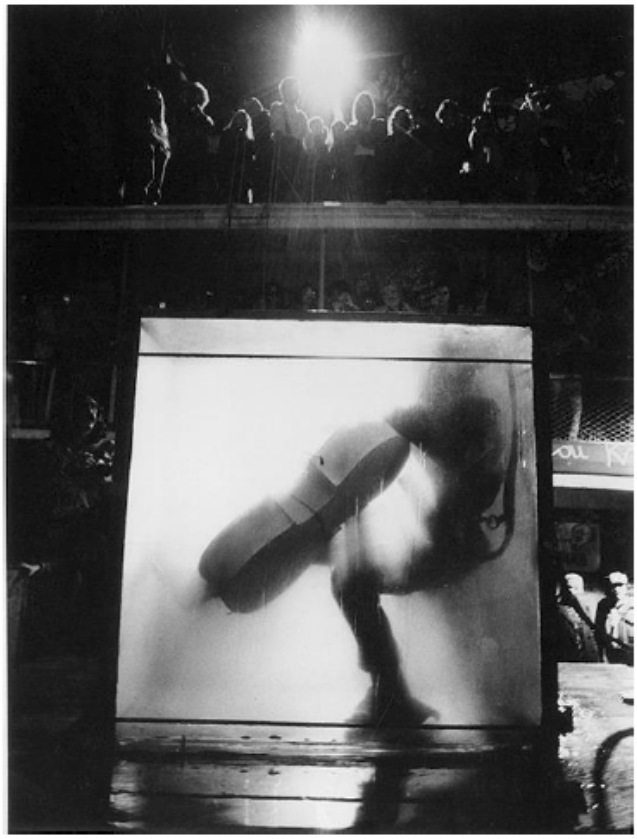

Figure 2.16: Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams's *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman* (1972) at the Ninth Annual New York Avant Garde Festival, 1972.

[68] Charlotte Moorman, telephone conversation with Andor Orand, April 6, 1979, relayed in an interview with Joan Rothfuss, May 3, 2005, quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 337.

This same concept extends to Moorman's performances of Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* (1964), the previously described work wherein Moorman pauses during a performance of *The Swan* to submerge herself in a massive basin of water before returning to play the piece while soaking wet. Saint-Saëns's original work, with its simple harmonies, shimmering accompanimental arpeggios, and singing melody line, is intended to evoke images of a graceful swan, gliding smoothly across the water. Of course, Paik's parodic variation introduces elements of shock and surprise with Moorman's mid-movement disruption. The premiere performance, though, was itself disrupted in an unplanned way. As the local papers reported it, "Emerging from the tank, the dripping artist hit her head on a [ceiling] pipe, opening a cut over her eye, but, undaunted, she completed the concert. [...] As she rose to take a bow, blood streamed down her forehead and spilled onto her cello. Bravos were shouted by the milling audience while Miss Moorman was given first-aid by a nurse."[69] This chance mishap enhanced Paik's satirical intention in writing the piece, and it pleased him greatly. "Beautiful, beautiful!" he shouted as the premier reached its bloody conclusion.[70]

In viewing video clips from some of Moorman's many performances of the *Variation*, it seems clear that Moorman's specific presence amplified the work's connotation. Moorman had been crowned a beauty queen in her early life, but, as Rothfuss notes, she was "not blessed with a ballerina's grace."[71] In several scenes, she is seen fidgeting with her gown, nearly tripping over her cello, grasping Paik's hand to steady her as she shakily climbed atop the ladder, and ponderously trekking back across the stage. As Moorman's former classmate recalls, "Charlotte had a walk, that was—has been described as a gait, when she would go down the hall, that was

[69] As quoted from various news reports in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 116.

[70] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 116.

[71] Ibid.

very purposeful."[72] Another describes her memory of Moorman "always lugging her cello," which was, for a young woman, "sort of a funny instrument."[73] The artist Letty Eisenhaur remembers her as "a woman who's a tiny bit zaftig, and who's always looking as though she needs to have her lipstick put on straight and her clothes adjusted."[74] The way Moorman inhabited her body with a bit of clumsiness lent favor to Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns,* adding to the composer's satirical aim of "tak[ing] very clichéd classical music and put[ting] some salt and pepper in."[75] In using as its foundation a theme which is supposed to evoke the elegance and grace of a gliding swan, Moorman's performances of Paik's *Variation* instead depict a clunky rendering of the swan askew. Though perhaps an unintentional embellishment to the work, Moorman's essence of being created an inimitable performance standard for Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns;* that is, without Moorman performing it, the piece as its authentic self does not exist.

Thus far, I have described the ways in which Moorman insisted on her identity as a musician, expanding the interpretative possibilities of her work; and the ways in which her practice evolved to become inseparable from her specific body. From here, I suggest that two themes emerged: first, having transcended the traditional definitions of what counts as "music" or as a "cello," Moorman's performances exhibited a curious reversal of subjective and objective roles which, in part, rendered her body an object—an instrument—itself. Second, in the context of an irrevocable unification of Moorman's body with her performance work, her practice calls into question notions of agency as we contend with the relationship of her instrument(s) to her

[72] Weinberg and Paik, "Topless Cellist."

[73] Ibid.

[74] Rothfuss, 173.

[75] Nam June Paik, interview with Jason Weiss, *EAR Magazine of New Music* 9 (Fall 1985): 37, as quoted in Rothfuss, 116.

body as either fixed or fluid extensions of her self.

"One in a series of events produced by Jim McWilliams which highlight Charlotte Moorman and Cello as performers," reads the postcard advertisement for the 1972 New York Aquarium performance of *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman*. This subtle semantic shift in describing the piece imposes a significant distortion of roles for the performer and her instrument, again exerting pressure on longstanding musical tradition. In a most basic sense, there is a relationship between subject and object in which the subject is an entity with consciousness, agency, and power to wield over some other entity (an object).[76] In granting a performance role to the cello (or as McWilliams presented it in proper noun form, Cello), the instrument shifts from its existence as an *object* upon which Moorman wields her power, to a *subject* which has agency of its own. This reversal consequently withdrew from Moorman her subjective agency as a performer, for without an object upon which to exert power, the nature of having such power is illegible. In *The Intravenous Feeding of Charlotte Moorman,* Moorman and Cello are both subject and object, neither more powerful than the other.

In her collaborations with Paik, Moorman similarly lost some agency as a performer and gained some utility as a performance apparatus. In Paik's *TV Cello* (1971), Moorman performs with three television monitors, stacked with the smallest in the middle to imitate the shape of a cello, manipulating the televised images with her bow across its strings. The television monitors display live, closed-circuit images from the performance in real time; pre-recorded video collages of performances by Moorman, other cellists, Janis Joplin, and John Cage; and live broadcast television. *TV Cello* is performed while wearing Paik's *TV Glasses* (1971), wherein a

[76] Dwayne H. Mulder, "Objectivity," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed August 23, 2020, https://iep.utm.edu/objectiv/.

live recording of the performance is projected on two tiny screens attached to a pair of dark aviator glasses, casting the spectacle of the performance back toward the viewer [Fig. 2.17].

Figure 2.17: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *Concerto for TV Cello with his TV Glasses*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, 1972.

The aural component of the performance comes not from the various televisual presentations, but rather from a contact microphone placed closely to the TV cello, picking up the sounds of Moorman's bowing and plucking of its strings.[77] Rothfuss comments on this commingling of mediums:

[77] John G. Hanhardt, "Paik's Video Sculpture" in Hanhardt, *Nam June Paik*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982), 95-97.

> Think of it: three iconic performers [Cage, Joplin, Moorman], one live and two virtual, whose bodies have all been transformed by video. Cage and Joplin were rendered silent and reduced to light...while Moorman's flesh-and blood corpus accomplished the liberation Paik had predicted: her skin became a projection screen and her eyes both received images and transmitted them.[78]

In *TV Cello*, Paik willed the "liberation of TV from the TV box,"[79] which was accomplished in a literal sense by removing the televisions from their casings, exposing their tubes and wires. Symbolically, this aim is coupled with Paik's desire to "humanize technology," which he accomplishes in *TV Cello* by giving agency and power to the television monitors: the monitors became active participants in performance, their exposed tubes collaborating with Moorman's body in an act of televisual distortion, their projections altering Moorman's appearance in real time as the light from the screens cast itself upon her skin. In turn, Moorman's role is reduced to a single node in a network of televisual interfaces as she becomes a vehicle for receiving and delivering technological information. Though Paik's published aim to humanize the technological medium does not account for its converse counterpart of technologizing the human, both possibilities are at play in the Paik/Moorman collaborations. Presumably, Paik did acknowledge this subversion of roles; for instance, in his titling of *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), wherein Moorman is assigned the role of "sculpture" in the work's very title.

Another way of examining the complex coupling of instrument and performer, subject and object, technological and human, is through the concept of bodily extension. In this discussion, "extension" carries meaning separate from the previous analysis of semantic theories of extension and intension. Here, I propose that Moorman's relationship with her cello as a physical extension of her body significantly impacted the reception of her roles in performance.

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[78] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist.* 267.

[79] Galeria Bonino, *Nam June Paik/Charlotte Moorman*, undated news release [1971], CMA.

As Hilton Als put it, "Moorman took her cello and married it to her body," thereby crafting her body as an instrument itself, à la feminist performance artist Carolee Schneeman.[80] Als's portrait of the cellist married to her cello suggests an irrevocable unification of performer and instrument. Conversely, Kathy O'Dell suggests that "Moorman came to understand her cello as an extension of her body, not an entity with which she 'became one.'"[81]

I suggest that both interpretations ring true. O'Dell's argument hinges on the notion that Moorman insisted upon her bodily presence as the foremost element of performance, the cello's existence "flourish[ing] only when she considered herself the primary focus of the audience's attention."[82] Moorman's partial nudity, O'Dell writes, further served to foreground her body in performance, rendering the cello secondary to her presence before viewers. In setting up this hierarchical dichotomy between Moorman and her cello, O'Dell presents a notable conclusion: "...understanding her cello as an extension of her body allowed Moorman to remain first and foremost before her audience and to do with her instrument whatever she wished. As such, she left the cello for us, as viewers, to contend with its meanings, which change over time."[83] That is, if Moorman retains her position as a subject with agency in her interactions with the audience, then a "cello" made of a military practice bomb, for instance, is her object; and the audience must then contend with the historical, political, and social contexts that are adhered to that object.

In addition to O'Dell's analysis, though, I contend that the power dynamics between

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[80] Hilton Als, "The Legacy of the 'Topless Cellist,'" *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2016, accessed August 13, 2020, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/12/charlotte-moorman-the-topless-cellist.

[81] Kathy O'Dell, "Bomb-Paper-Ice: Charlotte Moorman and the Metaphysics of Extension," in Liza Corrin and Corrine Granof, eds. *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 153.

[82] O'Dell, "Bomb-Paper-Ice," 156.

[83] Ibid., 165.

Moorman and her cello were less rigidly fixed, forming instead a reciprocal relationship in which notions of agency, subjectivity and objectivity were transfigured according to the contexts of performance. McWilliams's *Ice Music* (1972), for example, presents a scenario in which Moorman and her cello are each imposing physical changes upon one another: Moorman, using a file, a saw, a long piece of plexiglass, and other various tools, played a cello-sized block of ice until it melted away; in turn, the ice cello inflicted frostbite on the artist's nude body. Moorman did have some power of control in that her actions could somewhat determine the speed at which the ice chipped and melted away. Conversely, she was subservient to the molecular process in which ice turns to water, her body forced to endure the dangerous and painful effects of hypothermic exposure. Moorman was aware of the power the ice-cello wielded over her body. Recalling the piece's premiere, she said:

> You see, I could have gone longer. And I was thinking, the only decision that I was going to make last night was: should I continue and control the ice-cello, or should I let the ice-cello control me? And while I'm thinking whether to let it control me, or whether I should control it, while I'm thinking this, and before I've decided what to do… it took over me.[84]

These two elements—Moorman's control in playing the ice cello, and the ice cello's agency in causing the artist pain—are equal components of the work as a whole. *Ice Music* has to do as much with the ice cello as it does with Moorman's body. In this way, Als's characterization of Moorman and her cello as a married whole becomes tenable. Moorman's role in a performance of *Ice Music* as an artist willfully enduring suffering for her art cannot exist without the ice cello's infliction of such pain; and the large block of ice cannot exist as a "cello" without

[84] Charlotte Moorman, interview with Reinhard Oehlschlägel, Bremen, May 5, 1978, quoted in Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication," unpaginated.

Moorman enacting her role as cellist. Each of the performance entities owe meaning to their contextual counterparts.

In either case, whether Moorman considered her instrument as part of herself or as an extension of her body, the inference of both scenarios is that Moorman's body was integral to her performance work. By her own decisive actions, and at the direction of the artists and composers with whom she worked, Moorman crafted an oeuvre in which her physical body became synonymous with and inseparable from the work itself. It was this radical, intersubjective approach that sowed the seeds for what would soon become Moorman's reputation as a bold and daring performance artist whose immutable presence in performance would inspire works from some of the avant-garde's most esteemed composers and artists; but it would also later preclude her from serious consideration in the written histories of the American avant-garde. In the following chapters, I will discuss the ways in which Moorman's practice—one which was inherently embodied; one that blurred the lines between art and life; one that explored politics and the dynamics of the feminine body, gender roles, and sexuality—collided with notions of what was considered acceptable in music at the time. Further, I will explore how a contemporary analysis of her work, which acknowledges her embodied approach as integral to its meaning, offers a reenvisioning of her practice as fundamental to the aesthetic development of the avant-garde.

CHAPTER 3

THE ABSENT BODY

Music, as Mind, as Computer

> *However airtight the speculative systems of music theory might be, in real life the body constantly intrudes into this domain—and it always has. More and more it seems to me that what truly organizes music in the West is the tension between the inescapable body and the West's need to control or transcend that body through intellectual idealism.*
>
> —Susan McClary

The body has long been absent from Western academic colloquy. René Descartes's famous aphorism ("I think, therefore I am") certainly long-influenced philosophical thought, and this ontological dualism found a home in Western academia, persisting as an unexamined and unchallenged assumption for more than three centuries. Cartesian philosophy famously and radically separated the mind and its consciousness from the body: *thinking* was perceived as occurring within the disembodied mind; *feeling* was relegated to the sensate body. Because intellect and rationale were considered the pinnacle of human essence, this mind-versus-body dichotomy relegated the body to the periphery of scholarly activity.[85] Even recent models of cognitive science perpetuate a disembodied approach, relying on a metaphor of the brain-as-computer, a machine concerned solely with computational inputs and outputs.[86]

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[85] See Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: "I move therefore I am"* (London: Routledge, 2012), 8-20.

[86] Alternative models include: Francisco J. Varela and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Michael L. Anderson and Michael J. Richardson, "Eroding the Boundaries of Cognition: Implications of Embodiment," *Topics in Cognitive Science* 4, no. 4 (2012), 717-730; Agustín Ibáñez and Diego Cosmelli, "Moving Beyond Computational Cognitivism: Intersubjectivity and Ecology of Mind," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 42, no. 2 (2008), 129-136; Joaquín Barutta and Pía Aravena, "The Machine Paradigm and Alternative Approaches in Cognitive Science," *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science* 06, no. 2 (2010), 176-183. For music cognition, specifically, see: Marc Leman, *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (Cambridge: MIT, 2007); Marc Leman and Pieter-Jan Maes, "The Role of Embodiment in the Perception of Music," *Empirical Musicology Review* 9 (2014), 236-246; Bradford Mahon and Alfonso Caramazza, "A Critical Look at the Embodied Cognition Hypothesis and a New Proposal for Grounding Conceptual Content," *Journal of Physiology-Paris* 102 (2008), 59-70.

Surely, these models influenced musical thought well into the twentieth century. As Arnold Schoenberg once famously put it:

> Music need not be performed any more than books need to be read aloud, for its logic is perfectly represented on the printed page; and the performer, for all his intolerable arrogance, is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print.[87]

Schoenberg's sentiment, while markedly blunt, was hardly novel. Rather, it encapsulated a notion that permeated musical thought for centuries: that music is text; and as text, it is to be understood cognitively. Carolyn Abbate suggests that, in devaluing embodiment and rendering insignificant the act of performance, this "metaphysical mania encourages us to retreat from real music to the abstraction of the work."[88]

Similarly, Susan McClary has observed that the "absence of humane music criticism" (a phrase borrowed from Stanley Cavell) has "dominated discussions about music throughout most of Western history—at least as far back as Pythagoras (sixth century B.C.)."[89] Indeed, though not entirely unchallenged,[90] this strand of Western thought maintained a discursive dominance which was bolstered particularly by nineteenth-century notions of "absolute music,"[91] and taken up later by the avant-garde. In 1994, Suzanne Cusick notably labeled this issue as musicology's "Mind/Body problem:"

> Music, an art which self-evidently does not exist until bodies make it and/or receive it, is thought of as it it were a *mind-mind* game...That is, we have changed an art that exists only when, so to speak, the Word is made Flesh, into an art which is only the Word.

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[87] Schoenberg, as quoted in Dika Newland, *Schoenberg Remembered: Diaries and Recollections (1938-76)* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1980), 164.

[88] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004), 505.

[89] Susan McClary, "Music, the Pythagoreans, and the Body," in *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 82.

[90] For instance, contrasting eighteenth-century philosophies include those of sensationalism and materialism.

[91] See Sanna Pederson, "Defining the Term 'Absolute Music' Historically," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 2 (May, 2009), 240-262.

> Metaphorically, we have denied the very thing that makes music music, the thing which gives it such enormous and sensual power.[92]

The perception of music as an autonomous intellectual activity which transcends the social, cultural, political body, maintained its foothold through the whole of the nineteenth century.[93] And, as McClary observes, it was the twentieth century avant-garde which concretized this model, taking the concept even further by associating musical prestige with the complete renunciation of social functions and values.[94] McClary points to excerpts from essays written by Arnold Schoenberg (1937), Roger Sessions (1950), and Milton Babbitt (1958), each of whom insist on music being purely intellectual: that is, nonsocial, disembodied.

Perhaps no medium encapsulated this position as well as electronic and technologically mediated music. Brian Kane, referencing Pythagoras not in terms of Cartesian dualism, but rather concerning the "Pythagorean veil" which serves as a metaphor for "pure listening," draws the following conclusion: "The practitioners of *musique concrète* invoke Pythagoras in order to pronounce their own origin. It is an act of auto-poiesis or self-foundation. The tale of the Pythagorean veil is the primal scene of de-visualised music."[95] In other words, by "de-visualizing" and thus dehumanizing the medium, composers of electronic music effectively remove from the music any construction of social function. The music is an object which exists

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[92] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 16.

[93] Scholars point to several reasons for the longevity of a disembodied approach. See Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (London: SAGE, 2008); Janet Wolff, "The Ideology of Autonomous Art," foreword to *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception,* ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-12.

[94] Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition," in *Cultural Critique* 12, no. 1, (Spring 1989), 60.

[95] Brian Kane, *"Acousmate:* History and de-visualized sound in the Schaefferian tradition," *Organised Sound* 17, no. 2 (2012), 180.

autonomously, insulated from, as McClary puts it, "the contamination of the outside social world."[96]

The early American avant-garde, then, was defined by these ideas of music as autonomous and an emphasis on "pure" (de-visualized) listening, bolstered by the centralization of electronic music as its medium. Even electronic works which involved human performance or vocalization were granted a position of aural "purity" by modernist theories of mediated sound. The ontological separation of sound from its source, Kane observes, was a cornerstone of modernist musical thought.[97]

There is perhaps no richer example than Milton Babbitt's *Philomel* (1964) for voice and tape. The haunting work, based on an Ovid-inspired text by poet John Hollander, captures the psychological dissolution of a woman who has been brutally raped, silenced, and confined. Philomel, having become mute at the hands of her rapist who cut out her tongue, transcends suffering upon metaphysical transfiguration. Through fragmentation, disintegration, and transubstantiation, Philomel eclipses her affliction as she becomes music ("I am becoming my own song," "As if a new self/Could be founded on sound"). Further, Emily Adamowicz notes that Babbitt's treatment of the echo bears both musical and narrative effect. In making use of the live voice and the taped voice (both of the same performer), Adamowicz suggests, Babbitt sets up a dichotomy, where the live voice is perceived as immediate and the taped voice is a representative, disembodied sound. As the music and the text progress, Philomel becomes further disengaged from her immediate self, the live voice becoming increasingly more fragmented,

[96] McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 60.

[97] Kane also acknowledges this principle as "being closely tied to the history and rise of the autonomous work in the nineteenth century." Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 136.

shattered, and "reassembled serially into 'a million Philomels'").[98] The "disembodying power of the echo," Adamowicz concludes, "facilitates her literal disembodiment into an ultimate and essential nature."[99]

Philomel emblematizes, literally and figuratively, the exaltation of disembodied sound: in narrative terms, Philomel is reconciled only through transfiguration out of the material world and into autonomous sound; musically, the live (embodied) voice is overtaken by the triumph of electronic manipulation. It should be noted that Babbitt himself would discourage such subjective analysis of the piece.[100] Often considered to be positivistic in his approach, Babbitt warned of the "rich ramifications" in relating musical content to the "mundane banalities" of everyday life[101] (though one wonders, and McClary asks, "...if content is really not an issue, why such horrendous subject matter?").[102]

The construction of disembodied sound, made possible through early avant-garde era electronic technologies of sound reproduction and manipulation, served to further concretize the ungrounding of sound production from corporeality. Furthermore, the monopoly held by elite institutions on the production and understanding of "serious" music contributed to the pervasiveness of intellectual idealism within the field.[103] Such is the backdrop against which

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[98] McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 75.

[99] Emily Adamowicz, "Subjectivity and Structure in Milton Babbitt's *Philomel," Music Theory Online* 17, no. 2 (2011).

[100] Adamowicz acknowledges that the composer would likely criticize hermeneutic and aesthetic theorizing of the work, though, "ultimately, there is great reward in drawing Babbitt's music into the never-never land of interpretation." Emily Adamowicz, "Subjectivity and Structure in Milton Babbitt's *Philomel," Music Theory Online* 17, no. 2 (2011).

[101] Milton Babbitt, *Words about Music* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 182-183.

[102] McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 75.

[103] McClary suggests that echoes of this early avant-garde exclusivity remain: "it has become the conservative stronghold of the current music scene, for it holds stringently to difficulty and inaccessibility as the principal signs of its integrity and moral superiority" at the hands of "academic composers who are attempting to reassert their greater prestige," she writes. McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 67.

Moorman's career emerged: an emphasis on devisualized, disembodied music which is entirely divorced from social contexts; an institutional stronghold on "serious" music; and a distinctly twentieth-century "who cares if you listen?"[104] approach.

A Spectacle of the Spectacle

Although the Schoenbergian emphasis on music as disembodied sound remained an institutional citadel, this concept did not go unchallenged in the broader landscape of the developing avant-garde. "Milton Babbitt and John Cage are the two extremes of avant-garde music," Richard Kostelanetz declared in the New York Times. "Cage and Babbitt, Babbitt and Cage—they are two polar figures in American music today; each is the leader of a wing of avant-garde music so extreme that neither will acknowledge the relevance, or even validity, of each other's work."[105] In setting up this dichotomy, Kostelanetz references the divergence between two disparate avant-garde ideologies borne of similar origin. Babbitt, whose work built upon Scheonberg's serialist technique, and Cage, himself a student of Schoenberg's, each sought to liberate music from the constraints of traditional harmonic and melodic contexts, albeit through entirely different means.

Whereas Babbitt and his contemporaries engaged a mathematical and academically rigorous approach to composition, often utilizing the computer to produce mechanically perfect renderings of their works, Cage's compositional procedures relied instead on chance and relished

[104] Milton Babbitt wrote an essay, "The Composer as Specialist," for the 1958 issue of *High Fidelity* magazine. The publishers infamously, and without Babbitt's authorization, retitled it as "Who Cares if You Listen?" See Gabrielle Zuckermann, "An Interview with Milton Babbitt," *American Public Media* (July 2002), accessed August 25, 2020, http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_babbit.html.

[105] Richard Kostelanetz, "Milton Babbitt and John Cage are the Two Extremes of Avant-Garde Music," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1967, accessed August 25, 2020, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1967/01/15/133022952.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0.

the uncertainty of natural and environmental sounds and silences. As Dmitri Tymoczo decoratively put it:

> Babbitt [was] straight, Jewish, politically conservative, and southern, a skeptical rationalist who talks like a mathematician on speed. Cage...was gay, goyish, politically left, and Californian, a genial fruitcake whose enthusiasms ran toward astrology, mushrooms, Zen, and anarchist politics. Babbitt's music is fastidiously organized, each of his notes carefully placed within multiple nested rhythmic and melodic patterns. Cage's music, by contrast, is scrupulously disorganized, composed randomly—for instance by tossing coins or tracing astronomical maps onto music paper.[106]

Whereas Moorman's performance work was starkly at odds with the disembodied "wing" of the avant-garde, it seems she might then have merited consideration within the other side's approach, as the two appear to be diametrically opposed. Amidst this divergence between the two, though, emerged a commonality shared by these otherwise antipodal perspectives: a shared disdain for performers as self-indulgent entities. Recalling from the previous subchapter Schoenberg's infamous position on viewing the performer, "for all his intolerable arrogance," as "totally unnecessary," we see a similar posture from John Cage in his reaction to Moorman's interpretation of *26'1.1499" for a String Player*. In conversation with scholar Gisela Gronemeyer, Cage bluntly summated his issue with Moorman's performances: "There was no devotion to the piece really, no, it was a devotion to herself as a performing artist."[107]

Ostensibly, this statement seems a tenable explanation for why Cage grew to detest Moorman's interpretation of the work, especially in combination with the previously noted issues of Moorman's failure to adhere to its temporal demands. However, given Cage's own move "towards theater,"[108] and considering the contextual subtleties of the work, this

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[106] Dmitri Tymoczo, "The Sound of Philosophy," *The Boston Review*, October 1, 2000, accessed August 25, 2020, http://bostonreview.net/arts-culture/dmitri-tymoczko-sound-philosophy.

[107] Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman," in *Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology*, ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), unpaginated.

[108] Cage once rhetorically asked, "where do we go from here?" and answered, "towards theatre. That art more than music resembles nature. We have eyes as well as ears, and it is our business while we are alive to use them." John

characterization of Moorman's *26'1* interpretation as imperiously vain seems curious. Of all things to consider, even the title of *26'1* implies that a proper realization of the work requires an active, living performer: rather than *26'1.1499" for Cello*, Cage specified that the work is *for a String Player*. Tradition would favor the former, for historically, one would not write a "concerto for cellist," or "sonata for a string player and a pianist," but rather, a "concerto for cello" or a "sonata for cello and piano." This subtle semantic shift bears significant weight in the context of modernist musical thought that dominated the early American avant-garde, for in acknowledging and centering the essential nature of the performer's physical body, *26'1* rebukes the notion that music is the sum of its text and may exist wholly on the page as a devisualized, disembodied form of art.

Cage himself typified this subversion in foregrounding the spectacle of human action/ interaction in his other compositions and during his own performances. For example, *Water Walk* (1959), *Theatre Piece* (1960)*, and Variations IV* (1963) each emphasize an engagement with theater, relying equally on the visual and musical components of performance. Included in *Theatre Piece* were actions such as popping balloons, cutting hair, reading a newspaper, and hitting the strings of a piano with a dead fish.[109] In *Variations IV*, one of the eight variations which William Fetterman regards as "musicircus" pieces, there are no indications of instrumentation, duration, or dynamics. Instead, the score is made of a sheet of transparency, with nine circles to be cut out and placed on a floorplan of the performers' venue, creating a spatial diagram of where performers are to stand and generate musical sounds. The resultant music may include the sounds of opening a window, closing a door, recycling cans and bottles,

Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 12.

[109] William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 108.

ambient "outside sounds," or any other sound-producing activity.[110] The presented performance, then, is made up of this amalgamation of indeterminate and determinate sounds—the music; but an equally important part of the performance is the visual spectacle of its performers inhabiting the performance space in a musically nontraditional manner, rather than gathered together on a concert stage.

In composing *Water Walk*, Cage described the work as being one that "wishes to be a piece of music," one that would "introduce visual elements in such a way that can be experienced as theater."[111] It was indeed theatrical, requiring the performer to move about the stage, holding up sound-producing objects so that the audience can see them, performing actions such as smashing radios, squeezing a rubber duck, firing off party streamers, watering flowers, and more. Incidentally, Cage amplified the spectacularism of *Water Walk* by performing it on the television game show, *I've Got a Secret*, in 1960; though a similar venture of the avant-garde into the world of primetime television by Charlotte Moorman's appearances on the *Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* and *The Mike Douglas Show* would later earn Moorman scorn. Differences in reception aside, the similarities between Cage's performance of *Water Walk* and Moorman's performances of *26'1.1499" for a String Player* are striking. Both performances were anchored by the use of traditional instruments: for Cage, the grand piano; for Moorman, the cello. They each employed domestic objects as supplementary instruments, such as Cage's water pitcher, bathtub, and radios; Moorman's telephone, electric skillet, and record player; and the household blender, used in both pieces. In *Water Walk*, Cage drinks a Campari soda; in *26'1,* Moorman drinks a Coca-Cola. During his performance, Cage is seen frequently referencing his pocket

[110] Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 125-127.

[111] Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 113.

watch, as *Water Walk*, just like *26'1*, is grounded by a strict set of temporal requirements for each specified group of actions. Arguably, Cage and Moorman took near-identical approaches in performing these pieces, resulting in performances that centered the visual spectacle of themselves as an equally significant counterpart to the work's aural output. Why, then, was Cage so aggrieved by Moorman's "devotion to herself" in performing *26'1*?

Piekut suggests that the politically charged nature of Moorman's performances, specifically those involving collaboration with Paik, contributed to Cage's disparagement. "Because Moorman's and Paik's theatricality was not only an explicitly corporeal but also an explicitly referential display," he writes, "their split from Cage deepened. [...] Whereas the older composer held various aspects of the social and cultural movements of the 1960s at arms' length, Moorman and Paik seem to have channeled the spirit of the times into their theatrical and sonic imagery."[112] In making this argument, Piekut points to the performers' use of the military practice bomb, and the inherently political association of Paik's very presence: "Paik's topless Asian body was another kind of highly charged symbol in the United States during the 1960s. In this context, the inclination to associate him with the Vietnam War—or, for those who could identify Paik's nation of origin from his name, the Koren War—was solidified."[113] Piekut's observation cuts to the heart of this issue: the laden association with war in Moorman's and Paik's performances renders impossible a stance of neutrality in performing and observing the work; and this absence of political and personal neutrality conflicted with Cage's beliefs about what music should be.

[112] Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 164-165.

[113] Ibid.

Just as the early avant-garde clung to modernist theories of music as intellectual and therefore free from the intrusion of the sensate body in performance, Cage emphasized a position in which music is free from individual emotions, opinions, "likes and dislikes." "Art can be practiced in one way or another," he expressed, "so that it reinforces the ego in its likes and dislikes, or so that it opens that mind to the world outside."[114] Of his own position as a composer, Cage said, "I wanted my work to be free of my own likes and dislikes, because I think music should be free of the feelings and ideas of the composer." When Richard Kostelanetz asked Cage how emotion fit into his work, Cage replied: "It doesn't fit into my work. It exists in each person, in his own way; but I'm not involved with that. [...] Emotions have long been known to be dangerous. You must free yourself of your likes and dislikes."[115] While Babbitt's avant-garde extracted sound from corporeality, Cage's practice extricated corporeality from human subjectivity. In this context, we may assume that Cage viewed his performances of *Water Walk* as a series of objective sound events, versus Moorman's and Paik's performances as rife with referential displays of personal taste, preference, ego, and political opinion.

Indeed, Moorman did not shy away from the theatricality of performance, but rather leaned further into it, generating, so to speak, a spectacle of the spectacle. "In the piece that I do by John Cage," Moorman explained,

> I play the cello, then I discard the cello and play Nam June Paik's back as a cello, then I discard him, then I play a bomb as a cello, everything is highly amplified. [...] In the same piece I cook, I scream, I play films, records, and drink Coca-Cola. So, just about every piece I do, especially the pieces of Nam June Paik, have political or social overtones.[116]

[114] Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 44.

[115] Ibid., 228.

[116] "Is New Music Being Used for Political or Social Ends?" *Source: Music of the Avant Garde* 3, no. 2 (6) (July 1969), 90, as cited it Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 165.

This overt admission of her social and political aims in performance references the way in which Moorman's performance practice fell at odds with Cage's philosophy of music. Kostelanetz's characterization of Babbitt and Cage as diametrically opposed figures leading two disparate branches of the American avant-garde summates the reigning philosophies of the genre. Each seeking a form of heightened intellectual or spiritual enlightenment, Babbitt's approach sought to remove music from the corporeal body, while Cage insisted on the absence of human subjectivity in embodied performance. Amidst these prevailing structures, Moorman's practice, as one that was theatrical, embodied, and referential of her own partialities, may be read as a subversive alternative. In the following section, I will explore how this distinctively personal embodied approach evolved, by Moorman's own intentions and at the hands of the composers with whom she worked, to become both sexual and sexualized.

"After the bombing, soldiers and sex"

Just as Moorman's entrance to the avant-garde seemed a logical progression—a series of chance encounters and serendipitous circumstances—so too was the evolution of her practice as one that was not just theatrical, but embodied; and not just embodied, but sexual and sexualized. In the following paragraphs, I will explore how Moorman's earliest interactions with Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*, accompanied by her serendipitous encounters with a number of composers and artists working in various avant-garde circles, influenced the production and reception of her performance work.

As previously noted, Moorman expressed that the Cage piece had "opened up a vast new sound world" for her as a classically trained cellist. Here, I contend that the work not only opened Moorman's ears toward a new set of sounds, but also her mind to an entirely new construction of musical performance. Indeed, some of her very earliest performances of *26'1* at

least partially prefigured the genre-bending approach for which she came to be known. One example of this influence is Philip Corner's *Solo with . . .* (1963), a piece written for Moorman to premiere on one of the 6 Concerts '63, the first major performance event following her debut recital at Corner's loft in which she had premiered her version of *26'1*. The text-only score for *Solo with . . .* instructs Moorman to "act like a soloist;" she realized the work by walking on and off stage, adjusting her clothing, polishing her cello, clearing her throat, fussing with her sheet music, and playing, in total, one pizzicato note.[117] Neither the piece nor Moorman's performance of it were overtly political, sexual, or subversive; but what Corner acknowledged in writing this piece for Moorman was that her visual presence was often a performance in itself. *Solo with . . .* brought into focus Moorman's unique inhabitation of her body as a traditionally beautiful yet slightly disheveled and perpetually disorganized young woman (we may recall Rothfuss's characterization of Moorman as having the beauty, but not the grace, of a ballerina). Anecdotally, the composer Morton Feldman approached Corner after the work's premiere, telling him, "You're the only composer who knows how to write for Charlotte."[118]

In many ways, this scenario could have been inconsequential, the work comprising just a sliver of a concert in a weeklong lineup of avant-garde performance events; but in Moorman's case, I suggest that it was the first in a chain of events that would come to define the remainder of her practice. Having realized the Cage score in ways that shifted its focus onto herself as integral to the music, Moorman acknowledged Corner's *Solo with . . .* as an extension of this concept. In this way, Moorman's performance of Corner's piece built upon her interactions with Cage's, configuring a groundwork for her practice which invited the artist to reenvision the

[117] Winthrop Sargeant, "Musical Events: It Just *Is*--Or *Is* It?," *New Yorker* 39, no. 30 (September 14, 1963): 122, CMA.

[118] Philip Corner, telephone interview with Joan Rothfuss, quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 73.

presence and implications of her specific body, in her specific time, as part of her work. This foundation greatly influenced her interactions with many of the composers and artists she was soon to meet.

In 1964, Moorman contacted the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen in order to arrange a production of his *Originale* (1961) as part of her second avant-garde festival at New York's Judson Hall. This is, of course, the previously referenced conversation in which Stockhausen instructed Moorman to contact Paik, and Moorman asked, "What's a Paik?" It was this conversation that led to Moorman's meeting Paik, which significantly altered the trajectory of her career; but had the circumstances leading up to their encounter differed, their collaborative relationship might not have taken off in the way that it did. *Originale* was a theatre piece in which actors, musicians, painters and other artists were cast to act freely as themselves for the duration of the work. For her role, Moorman played the cello while suspended from the venue's balcony, a rope pulley system raising and lowering her as she played [Fig. 3.1]. As part of this segment of the piece, the artist Carolee Schneeman, who was helping with costuming and props, suggested that Moorman perform semi-nude:

> She hated her dress. It was catching on the cello, she didn't like the shape of it, she didn't know what to wear. We were backstage. [...] I think it was a rehearsal. I said, "Why don't you just take your dress off? Leave it here till you come back down. I'm going to wrap you in a sheet and you'll look like a flying angel." [...] She said, "No, I'm too fat, I don't want to be naked up there." I said, "All right, it'll flutter, and some of your body will show." But I draped it so that it unraveled and fell off as she went up the rope with the cello. [...] It was astonishingly beautiful, naked Charlotte with the white sheet fluttering down as she's playing the cello. [...] When she came down, she said, "That felt wonderful!"[119]

Ultimately, rather than performing naked, Moorman chose instead to wrap herself in a dress

[119] Carolee Schneeman, interview by Joan Rothfuss, June 1, 2003, New Paltz, New York, quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 102. Rothfuss notes that Moorman failed to credit Schneeman for the idea, insisting instead that it was Allan Kaprow who suggested performing the piece seminude.

made of sheer gauze, underneath which she was nude [Fig. 3.2]. Rothfuss notes that even in choosing to partially clothe herself rather than embracing Schneeman's suggestion to perform nude, Moorman still "had moved very far indeed from the classical music convention in which the performer's body disappears in a cloak of black clothing."[120]

Figure 3.1: Charlotte Moorman performing in Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Originale*, 2nd Festival of the Avant Garde, New York City, September 1964. Photo: Fred W. McDarrah.

Figure 3.2: Charlotte Moorman performing with Priscilla the chimp in Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Originale*, 2nd Annual New York Avant Garde Festival, New York City, September 1964. Photo: Fred W. McDarrah.

[120] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 102.

Indeed, she had; and it was likely this very move that piqued Paik's interest in forming a partnership with Moorman after their participation in the *Originale* production. By the time Paik arrived in New York for the performance, he had grown disillusioned by his work as a composer, vowing to quit his musical career altogether and work in "the world of electronic TV" instead; but seeing Moorman's performance rekindled his interest. "It was very lucky for me to find her," he recalled, describing Moorman as "the first woman who...had a musical technique, courageousness, beauty, and artistic sensitivity," and who was "maybe the one and only candidate in the whole world" fit to bring his artistic vision to life.[121] Paik saw in Moorman an exceptional opportunity to create something altogether new, and he fervently pursued her artistic partnership. Recalling their first meeting, Moorman described Paik's tenacious request:

> We're sitting there, and he said, "I'll make a piece for you. And we'll become partners." [...] I'm looking at him wondering, why do I need him for a partner? [...] He was telling me all about these pieces he'd always wanted to do. He'd always wanted a beautiful girl to striptease, and he wanted me to play cello and take my clothes off. I just couldn't believe I was sitting there talking to this Oriental man about these things. [...] But there was something about him. He was so strong, so serious, that I listened. And everything in the world has happened to us as a result.[122]

Paik had previously incorporated his own nudity into his performances, doing a striptease while playing Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* in his 1961 composition *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*. Finding his own body insufficient in fulfilling his artistic vision, Paik tried, unsuccessfully, to find a woman who would be willing to perform the piece. He also failed to find a woman who would perform a striptease as part of his *Etude for Pianoforte*.[123] Later, Paik met Fluxus artist

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[121] Nam June Paik, "Charlotte Moorman: Chance and Necessity (c. 1992)," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt, Gregory Zinman, and Edith Decker-Phillips (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 29-31.

[122] Fred Sterne, "Charlotte Moorman and the New York Avant Garde: A Brief History by Fred Sterne," videotape interview, April 23, 1980, Baltimore, MD, CMA.

[123] Calvin Tomkins, "Profile: Video Visionary," *The New Yorker* (May 5, 1975), https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1975/05/05/video-visionary (accessed August 31, 2020).

Alison Knowles, and, hopeful that in her he had found his new collaborative partner, he wrote *Serenade for Alison* (1962). The score calls for Knowles to remove several pairs of panties, performing various actions with them ("look at the audience through them," "put them in the vest pocket of a gentleman," "stuff them in the mouth of a music critic") before ending the piece by showing the audience that she had no more panties on. Knowles performed the work twice, but ultimately found it objectifying and contrary to her own artistic aims, and she stopped performing the piece.[124]

Dissatisfied with the limitations of using his own body in performance, and disenchanted by Knowles's interpretation of his work as purely objectifying, Paik aspired to reconceptualize his artistic prospects alongside Moorman, who, importantly to him, was a classical musician.[125] To his delight, Moorman obliged. He proposed as his first idea that Moorman interrupt a performance of Saint-Saëns's *The Swan* to take a plunge into a water-filled basin, which was, of course, quickly realized as his *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* (1964). The piece with which Moorman was so transfixed though, was Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player*; and as one of their earliest collaborations, Paik conceived of the work *Human Cello* to be embedded within the Cage piece. When Moorman and Paik embarked on their first European tour in the spring of 1965, *26'1* was fundamental in their programming; and, as Rothfuss notes, Moorman's interpretation of the piece became more and more sexually suggestive as the tour continued: "By the time she performed it at *24 Hours* [the festival performance near the end of the tour], it included, in addition to the *Human Cello* segment, the popping of inflated condoms, live

[124] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 89.

[125] Paik acknowledged Knowles's willingness to perform his work, but lamented that she did not play a classical instrument. Paik, "Chance and Necessity," 32.

screams, and the taped sounds of cats in estrus and her own orgasmic moans."[126]

Surely, Paik seized the opportunity inherent in Cage's indeterminate score to further his agenda of sexualizing classical music; but Moorman's role in their collaboration was far from passive. Having established a self-referential style in her earliest performances, Moorman's chance meeting with Paik, coupled with her Schneeman-inspired incidental decision to partially disrobe for Stockhausen's *Originale*, led to a heightened awareness, for both artists, of Moorman's body in performance. Whereas Cage's *26'1* invited Moorman to invoke "sounds from entirely different sources," Philip Corner's piece opened up for her the possibility of using her physical presence as a performative tool, and Paik's ambition to sexualize the medium through their collaborations intensified the gendered and sexual overtones inherent in Moorman's presence. The resultant practice was one which amalgamated these themes of corporeality, objectivity, and sexuality, and intersected with politics, pop culture, and current events.

Moorman imparted this ubiquitously connotative presence on stage into each of her performances. One might compare her performances of Takehisa Kosugi's *Chamber Music (Anima 2)* (1962), for instance, to the composer's own rendering of the work. The score reads: "Enter into a chamber which has windows and doors. Put out different part of the body through each window. Go out from the chamber. The chamber may be made of a large cloth bag with door and windows made of zippers." In his performance, Kosugi "played with notions of confinement and escape,"[127] occasionally revealing his arm to shake a can of coins or a bag of

[126] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 128.

[127] Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, "Review: In 'Takehisa Kosugi: Music Expanded,' Violinist Uses More Than Strings and a Bow," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/15/arts/music/review-in-takehisa-kosugi-music-expanded-violinist-uses-more-than-strings-and-a-bow.html.

dry soup mix. One reviewer described a "palpable sense of relief" from the audience when Kosugi "emerged unscathed, Houdini-style" from his cloth chamber.[128] Contrarily, Moorman employed the "chamber" as a scene of sensual provocation, tossing and turning with her cello inside the soft cloth enclosure, revealing in turn a lock of hair, a bare foot, a glimpse of her naked breast or buttocks, her two eyes embroiling the audience in the act with a penetrative stare [Fig. 3.3]. Perhaps where Kosugi's audience anxiously awaited his escape, Moorman's audience relished in the seductive tension of her selective exposure.

Figure 3.3: Charlotte Moorman performing Takehisa Kosugi's *Chamber Music (Anima 2)* (1962) in Italy, July 1974.

Moorman's performances of Kosugi's *Chamber Music* are representative of a frequented approach in which she prepensely imparted nudity and sexual tension to her performances of works that did not explicitly call for such. Her practice of doing so, though, soon complicated the

[128] Matthew Erickson, "The Riotous Inventiveness of Takehisa Kosugi," *Frieze* (December 11, 2015), https://www.frieze.com/article/music-43.

reception of other pieces in her repertoire. We can recall from Chapter 2 Giuseppe Chiari's *Per Arco* (1964), the piece in which its performer is instructed to sensitively react to the taped sounds of Germany bombing Italy in World War II. The score reads:

> [The cellist] must enter into a state of inertia, but not one of resignation of indifference. Hidden in him there is a nervous force. He no longer believes in sound. He does not remember the taut positions of an instrumentalist. He is a man, who, after a destruction, finds himself with two objects. Cello & bow—survivors like him—& touches them almost unconsciously.[129]

Figure 3.4: Charlotte Moorman performing Guiseppi Chiari's *Per Arco* (1964) in Italy, 1983. Photo: Mario Parolin.

The piece is decidedly anti-war, calling on its performer to enact with fervor the vision of a helpless and aching survivor. Moorman surely attended to the work's sentiment in her performances. The existing photographs of the artist playing *Per Arco* are alone powerfully emotive, exhibiting Moorman, hunched over her cello, head rested in her hand, veins in her forehead bulging, weeping [Fig. 3.4]. One cannot help but to sense despair. When Moorman

[129] Giuseppe Chiari, *Per Arco*, score in CMA.

premiered the work, though, critics zealously rushed to connote sexuality. Leighton Kerner, writing for the *Village Voice*, described the performance:

> While a speaker roared out some harrowing sounds of war, [Moorman] did all kinds of naughty things to her cello. A contact microphone attached to the cello magnified every caress and stroke and rub that she gave the instrument. In fact, Miss Moorman seemed to be in such a passionate state that one wondered if Mr. Chiari's work might better have been named "Lady Chatterley's Cello."[130]

Another reviewer who attended the work's premiere more pointedly asserted: "After the bombing, soldiers and sex."[131] Later, while on tour with Paik in 1965, Moorman performed *Per Arco* on June 6, the twenty-first anniversary of D-Day, in Wuppertal, West Germany. Acknowledging the significant weight of that concert's date and geography, Moorman wrote,

> i have played Chiari's "Per Arco"
> in many countries but this time
> i have quite a strange feeling because
> i am in the german country
> that is bombing italy in the tape.
> do you recognize your sound
>
> vietnam dominican republic
> mississippi!!!
>
> i can not keep from crying.[132]

Even then, though, as Rothfuss notes, Moorman's tears could not neutralize the force of critics' desire to read sexuality into her performance. "[Moorman] stroked the wood of the cello she gripped between her knees as if it were the skin of a lover, sensually, as if in a trance," one reviewer wrote.[133] Moorman acknowledged and disparaged what had come to be a typical

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[130] Leighton Kerner, "Buzz, Buzz," *Village Voice*, September 3, 1964, accessed September 8, 2020, https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=6m8QAAAAIBAJ&sjid=LIwDAAAAIBAJ&pg=4899%2C2323675.

[131] Faubien Bowers, "A Feast of Astonishments," *The Nation,* September 28, 1964, 172, as quoted in Rothfuss, 93.

[132] Charlotte Moorman, "Cello," in *24 Stunden*, ed. Joseph Beuys, n.p (Itehoe Vosskate: Hansen and Hansen, 1965). Reprinted in Bonomo, *Cello Anthology*, n.p.

[133] Michael Mirus, "Maden in Moderner Kunst," *Der Mittag* [early June 1965], as quoted in Rothfuss, 127-128.

critical response, writing:

> the horrible sounds compel me to
> think about war—the audience is
> thinking about sex as i touch my cello—
> do all roads lead to sex?[134]

In *Per Arco*, neither the composer in his score, nor Moorman in her performance, intended to conflate sexuality with the violence of war; yet audiences were quick to imbue such connotations. It follows logically, then, that there were similar critical reactions to Moorman's later collaborations which did simultaneously reference both war and sex. In Aria 4 of Paik's *Opera Sextronique*, for instance, Moorman played a "cello" fashioned from a military practice bomb, undoubtedly a symbol carried over from her earlier performances of Cage's *26'1* in which she also used military surplus practice bombs [Fig. 3.5]. Clearly, the bomb carried significant political and cultural associations, and Moorman again embraced its use in her performances as an anti-war sentiment. When she appeared on *The Mike Douglas Show* in 1969, Douglas suggested that her inclusion of the bomb in Cage's *26'1* gave the performance a "very bad tone," and Moorman quickly countered, "Well, I think war generally has a bad tone."[135]

This sentiment was again muddled, though, in Paik's *Opera Sextronique* (1967), given its performance contexts. Not only does the title of the multi-movement work forthwith imply sexuality as its nuclear substance; the score also instructs Moorman to perform the four arias in various stages of undress, ending with the artist playing her bomb cello while completely nude in its final movement. Here, it is less of a stretch to suggest that Moorman embraced her instrument "sensually," or "as if it were [her] lover," to borrow the words of her former critics. Kristine

[134] Charlotte Moorman, "Cello," n.p.

[135] DVD of Charlotte Moorman's appearance on *The Mike Douglas Show*, viewed on December 7, 2016, Grey Art Gallery at New York University, *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s* exhibition.

Stiles, in a most provocative interpretation, described her view of the work:

> Tenderly embracing a military "practice bomb," the naked artist rested her head against the object that resembled an engorged, erect penis, nearly the height of her own body. Moorman was a picture of sensuality with dark flowing tresses, elegant eyebrows, long lashes, aquiline nose, and voluptuous lips. [...] Her bodily position suggested intercourse, legs wrapped around the sexualized object to reveal her belly, pubis, and pubic hair.[136]

Figure 3.5: Charlotte Moorman performing Aria 4 of Nam June Paik's *Opera Sextronique*, Düsseldorf, West Germany, 1968. Photo: Thomas Tilly.

Stiles's reading of this moment demonstrates the ways in which Moorman's practice had evolved to evoke salacious undertones, no matter the artist's intent. Such critical explications also illustrate a thematic motif of the sexualization of inanimate objects such as Moorman's cello, bow, and military practice bombs.[137]

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[136] Kristine Stiles, "'Necessity's Other': Charlotte Moorman and the Plasticity of Denial and Consent," in Liza Corrin and Corrine Granof, eds. *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s-1980s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 170.

[137] Reflecting on *Opera Sextronique* in 1988, Moorman expressed that the performance was not intended as a statement against the war in Vietnam, but that one intention was to "ironically contrast the brutality of war with the pacific beauty of nature." Journalist Sheila Anne Feeney points to the moments where tiny plane propellers are

Figure 3.6: Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik's *Variation on a theme by Saint-Saëns,* Second Annual New York Avant Garde Festival, Judson Hall, New York City, 1964.

Alongside this thread, too, emerged a parallel affair of bodily objectification. In a most literal display of this subversive approach, Moorman used Paik's body as an object, an instrument, in their *Human Cello* section of Cage's *26'1*. Moorman had already been subtly presenting her own body as an object interchangeable with her cello in performance, but it was *Human Cello* that solidified this theme of bodily objectification as Moorman plucked and bowed Paik's nude back as if he were any other instrument. In later performances of other works, Moorman would continue to act as an arbiter in this reversal of roles, by her own body evolving as a complex site of subjective/objective contestation, and in her implication of others' (notably, only men's) bodies as tools used in performance. In Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns,* for instance, Moorman's performances progressed from their original presentation, where

attached to Moorman's breasts and she covers her face with a gas mask. Sheila Anne Feeney, "Bare Reflections: The 'Topless Cellist' looks back on her art and her fight with cancer," *New York Life* (February 21, 1988), 3, CMA.

Moorman wore a formal gown and utilized a traditional stage setup, to a scene in which she wore only a clear plastic covering, used the back of one male assistant on his hands and knees as a stool, and used another man, lying on his back with Moorman's endpin in his mouth, as an endpin stopper [Fig. 3.6].[138]

In many ways, Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* was a prototype for Moorman's practice as a whole. Each of the themes explored here are rooted in Moorman's ongoing interactions with the Cage piece: nudity, sexuality, objectification of self and others, anthropomorphism and transfiguration of the cello, war and violence, and a shift in gendered power dynamics in which Moorman exerted dominant force over her male counterparts in performance. The matter which prevailed among these themes, though, attaching itself as a counterpart to each of them, was sexuality. In times where Moorman intended to foreground her sensuality, and in times where she explicitly did not, audiences and critics expeditiously anchored their interpretations in the venereal. When Moorman appeared nude, it was assumed to be sexual; transfigured cellos were frequently regarded as her "lovers"; war and violence were conflated with sex and desire; and the transference of power in Moorman's use of her male counterparts in performance provoked readings of erotic dominance and submission. In the following section, I will explore how Moorman's practice, as one that evolved to become both sexual and sexualized, further challenged her status as an apposite contributor to the developing avant-garde.

The Feminine Threat

In her hallmark text, *Feminine Endings,* Susan McClary takes issue with traditional

[138] The opportunities for a feminist reading of these situations are copious, and are explored in Chapter 4.

musicology's denial of eroticism and sexuality in classical music, chiding the discipline for its insistence on music as a "loftier" medium which is "not contaminated by the libidinal."[139] Seeking to rectify this discursive omission, McClary offers critical analyses of Bizet's *Carmen* and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony which examine musical constructions of gender and desire and the ways in which the musicological denial of eroticism influences and problematizes their traditional receptions. Here, using McClary's methodology as a framework, I suggest that Moorman's practice similarly destabilized each of the two reigning philosophies of the American avant-garde. Whereas McClary employs a hermeneutic approach to explore embedded inferences within these two nineteenth-century masterworks, I suggest that Moorman's performances offer a visceral retelling of the same narrative tensions.

McClary's analysis centers on the music assigned to three of Bizet's characters: Carmen, the seductress; Don José, the seduced; and Micaëla, Don José's childhood sweetheart, whose virginal innocence is presented in binary opposition to Carmen's overt sensuality. Micaëla's musical discourse, as McClary notes, is "simple, lyrical, sweet...her melody lines are diatonic (never deviating into insinuating inflections), her rhythms innocent of physicality;" whereas Carmen's music, in striking contrast, is loaded with "chromatic excesses," dance rhythms that engage and eroticize the body, and melodic lines that linger atop the underlying harmonic structure in ways that generate tension as she playfully (for McClary, "sadistically") withholds the gratification of harmonic resolution. Amidst these diametrical figures is José, whose stoic melodies suggest an adherence to "the well-behaved discourse of masculine European classical music," his lyrics suggesting a narrative urgency but his music centering on "the indefinite

[139] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 54.

postponement of gratification."[140] Musically and narratively, these three figures set up a basic structural tension that unfolds over the course of the opera, José abandoning Micaëla for Carmen's irresistible lure only to later lose her affection to a bullfighter, after which José murders Carmen in a jealous rage. McClary's hermeneutic analysis provides a convincing reading of Bizet's seminal work through its texted score.

The potency of McClary's exegesis, though, lies in her reading of the opera's multidimensional treatment of sexual and gendered politics, cultural anxiety, exoticism, eroticism, and the "threat" of feminine power. Having established Carmen's role as that of a victimizing threat whose carnal persuasions "contaminated" José's "well-behaved" masculinity (that is, his ideological transcendence beyond bodily impulses), McClary's assessment of Bizet's opera and its public reception offers a compelling theoretical framework which lends itself well to an analysis of Charlotte Moorman's practice.

In many ways, Moorman may be viewed as the literal embodiment of the same "threat" represented by Carmen. Consider McClary's description of Carmen's music:

> Significantly, [Carmen's] principal numbers are referred to neither by their texts nor by conventional operatic designation (e.g., aria or duet), but by their dance type designations: "Habañera" (a Cuban genre from Havana) and "Seguidilla." Her rhythms indicate that she is very much aware of her body. In fact, before she even begins to sing, her instrumental vamp sets a pattern that engages the lower body, demanding hip swings in response. Moreover, these rhythms are so contagious that they make José—and the listener—aware both of her body and also (worse yet) of their own bodies.[141]

In focalizing Carmen's corporeality, McClary suggests, the body is "thrust at us" by Bizet in a way that undermines one of European classical music's most fundamental tenets: an identification with the "pure" mind by way of denying the presence of the body. Read in this

[140] McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 57-59.

[141] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 57.

way, Carmen's character may serve as a direct metaphor for Moorman's performance practice. Just as Carmen's presence is positioned as undeniably physical by her alluring rhythmic impulses, so too was Moorman's by her idiomatic inhabitation of her often-nude body; each dissolving music's long-upheld ideological barrier between the mind and the body.

In her analysis, McClary describes the opera's narrative setup in which José, though ultimately the one who commits murder in its final scene, is perceived as Carmen's victim. Carmen, in her skilled manipulation of harmonic tension and release and her indulgence in chromatic melodic inflection, teases and taunts José as she withholds resolution. "In her musical discourse she is slippery, unpredictable, maddening…," McClary explains, "She knows how to hook and manipulate desire." It is in this proficiency of her seductive discourse that Carmen wields power over José, and because she solely controls the delivery and withholding of desirous gratification, Carmen is marked as a monstrous victimizer. "Had José obeyed his mother's wishes and married Micaëla," McClary notes, "he would never have experienced the contamination of sexual passion."[142]

Similarly, Moorman became a master of her own seductive rhetoric. Her performances of Kosugi's *Chamber Music*, for instance, generated a scene in which Moorman selectively granted and withheld glimpses of her nude body through the zippered openings of her "chamber." Simultaneously, she writhed around on the floor with her cello, embracing (with her own body) the body of her instrument, imitating and implying an intimate affair. In later performances of Paik's *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns,* Moorman wrapped herself in a "dress" made of transparent plastic, again teasing audiences with near, but not total, nudity; as an additional layer, she asserted her complete dominance over the two men she used in performance, one positioned

[142] McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 57.

underneath her as a stool, the other lying on the ground, steadying her cello's endpin in his mouth. Moorman, like Carmen, intentionally aroused desire and frustrated tensions through a skillful control of her sexuality as alternatingly coy, provocative, dominating, and selectively submissive.

In this way, we may view Moorman's practice as a transliteration of Carmen's role in the opera; Moorman, herself, an embodiment of the archetype for dangerous feminine power which Carmen came to represent. Whereas Carmen's libidinal displays were generated and maneuvered musically, her dance rhythms impelling erotic movement in her lower body, her lingering chromaticism and delay of harmonic resolution generating a maddening desire toward gratification; Moorman's body, itself, was a means to the same ends. If we subscribe to this comparison, José's role also translates: in Bizet's opera, Carmen's sensuality represents a threat to José as a platonic ideal of the bourgeoisie; so, whereas Moorman's body presents a tangible literalization of Carmen's subversive intention, the genre of classical music itself, with its disembodied approach and insistence on aural purity, is Moorman's "José." Her threat is to the supposed moral superiority of music as an art form free from the "contamination" of carnal desire. In simpler terms, whereas Bizet engaged two fictional characters in his narrative opera to represent a cardinal tension between desire and discarnation, Moorman physically embodied this critical issue in her practice as a whole.

At the height of this tension in Bizet's opera is the realization that Carmen's seductive rhetoric overpowers José's will to adhere to his ideological transcendence. As McClary explains, "Carmen's music…is made to be undeniably more powerful, more alluring than José's well-behaved discourse of masculine European classical music." In this instance, she writes, "The opera demonstrates vividly how impotent the sublime experience of transcendence is in the face

of the lowest common dominatrix."[143] In this same way, Moorman's overt displays of sensuality and sexuality threaten to overpower music's ontological separation of itself from the sensate body. It follows, then, that critics of Moorman's work similarly perceived the medium as being under attack by the artist's radical and seditious approach to musical performance: we may once more recall her occlusion from both Schoenberg/Babbitt's disembodied avant-garde and Cage's embodied yet depersonalized, "free from likes and dislikes" avant-garde.

The preceding paragraphs have drawn parallelisms between Moorman and Bizet's titular character, each of the two women functioning within their contexts as a "dissonant Other" who represents one side of classical music's binarism between acceptable and unacceptable constructions of female sexuality. This like-for-like comparison, though, deliquesces once we consider *Carmen's* fateful conclusion. Throughout the course of the opera, musically, Carmen's chromatic slippage delineates her specific narrative presence as sensual, sexual, and unrelenting in her enticement. Amidst all this chromaticism and withholding of harmonic resolution, her music arouses in José, and in the listener, a longing for tonal closure; that is, an end to Carmen's maddening chromaticism, even if that means her death. As McClary describes it, "Bizet's musical strategies...set up almost unbearable tensions that cause the listener not only to accept Carmen's death as 'inevitable,' but actually to *desire* it. [...] [Upon Carmen's death,] chromatic slippage (carefully defined throughout the opera as 'the feminine') is purged once and for all from the discourse as though by natural necessity."[144] Indeed, José's (and the listener's) wish is granted in the final scene as Bizet's orchestrates a violent closure to the opera in which the seductress is murdered by the seduced. "The opera has a happy ending," McClary sardonically

[143] McClary, *Feminine Endings,* 59.

[144] McClary, *Feminine Endings*., 62.

remarks, "for the powers of transcendence finally save the day from such intolerable insubordination."[145] José, she concludes, has been appointed with a duty to "purge all traces of the exotic and chromatic, [and] to restore social and musical order *at any cost,"*[146] and as sympathizers to José's status as a victim of Carmen's malicious intent, listeners are granted a sense of resolve in the opera's final scene. In Moorman's case, no such resolution is offered, for she embodied this "threat" to patriarchal social and musical order in real life, and with her whole self.

Further complicating matters is the fact that Moorman was working within the contexts of a culture in which the sexual was political. It was indeed consequential that Moorman's career as an avant-garde musician began to flourish at the height of several salient cultural and political movements of the 1960s, including, most relevantly, the anti-war movement and the sexual revolution. Nam June Paik alluded to the seasonable circumstances of Moorman's nudity in performance when he described the duo's last-minute decision to have Moorman partially disrobe for a performance of "The Swan":

> …my eyes caught on something at the corner of the greenroom. There was a huge roll of clear plastic drop cloth… I pointed it out. "How about that?" She could not guess what I said. I repeated, "This is your formal." "Oh no," she screamed, quite perplexed. I noticed a quick change in her expression—in a split second I sensed something was clicking in her mind—feminine mystique. Shyness, shame, success, success de scandale, again her southern upbringing. Her mother at Arkansas… her vacillation went up and down in waves in a very short time. Many years later, I analyzed Greta Garbo's facial complexion and found that she can become a virgin, then a whore, then a saint and back to a virgin many times in a split second. I sensed that that kind of tension was passing through [Charlotte's] mind in this fateful second—after all it was 1965.[147]

[145] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 60.

[146] Ibid., 61, emphasis in the original.

[147] Nam June Paik, "Charlotte Moorman: Chance and Necessity" (c. 1992) in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik,* eds. John G. Hanhardt, Gregory Zinman, and Edith Decker-Phillips (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), 30-31.

"After all it was 1965," Paik wrote, suggesting that Moorman's awareness of the sociopolitical associations of her body and its nudity was at play in their collaborations. Acknowledging this awareness on Moorman's part allows for an interpretation of her work as alternatingly overtly, subtly, and subversively political.

For example, when considering the concurrent political discourse over women's reproductive freedom, Moorman's early performances of Cage's *26'1* may be read as cogent contributions to the conversation. In reading aloud instructions for the insertion of Tampax tampons, an advertisement for "comfortable panties," and a classified ad from Planned Parenthood for birth control as a few of her "sounds from entirely other sources" in performance, Moorman not only foregrounded the normalization of women's anatomy and sexual health, but she also directly referenced what was, at the time, a polemical debate on the legalization of oral contraceptives. The invention of "the Pill" in 1960 was highly controversial, its advocates celebrating the freedom granted to women by the separation of sex from procreation, its critics claiming that it promoted sexual promiscuity and deviance, leading to national moral decline. With these pointed additions to a work by John Cage, whose philosophies so often centered on the unbiased sounds of the "natural world," Moorman brought women's sexual freedom into the realm of the commonplace as a conversation that was no more consequential than, say, cooking mushrooms on a hot plate, which she also did in many *26'1* performances.

Another culturally permeating inclination in the 1960s was the interrelation of war and sex, which was of course a result of two concurrently evolving movements: the anti-Vietnam war protests and the sexual revolution. Evidentiary of this phenomenon are two of the most famous slogans of the anti-war movement: "Make Love, Not War" and "Bombing for Peace is Like Fucking for Virginity." John Lennon and Yoko Ono similarly commingled the two in their 1969

Bed-Ins for Peace, wherein the artists invited the press into their honeymoon hotel rooms and, rather than stoking the likely expectation of an erotic display, instead used the time and coverage to promote peace as the Vietnam war raged on. In this light, Moorman's performances with the bomb cellos, and of Chiari's *Per Arco*, may be viewed as interwoven threads in the fabric of a culturally critical national conversation.

Here, it is fruitful to examine music's twentieth-century relationship to politics in order to understand how Moorman's practice fell further outside the limits of musical traditions at the time. Lydia Goehr, writing of the Austrian composer Hanns Eisler's complex relationship to music, politics, and political music, describes Eisler's attempt to "abolish the reigning bourgeois and fetishistic view of music, and to replace it with a view of music as inseparable from politics."[148] In her analysis, Goehr presents a critical view of music in which an awareness of extra-musical contexts is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of music's meaning. In line with McClary's position, she similarly describes a binarism in musicological thought between the insistence on music as a autonomous medium which is "non-referential, non-discursive, non-representational, and non-conceptual;" versus the impulse to "pull music down from its romantic pedestal" in order to understand it as a meaningful contributor to sociocultural conversations. "Between the desire to reduce music to politics, on the one hand, and to preserve the purity of music, on the other," she writes, "lies a delicate position."[149]

It is in this delicate middle ground where Eisler's music exists, Goehr suggests, for in his life, he was highly engaged in anti-fascist activism and expressed many times in his writings that music ought to transform itself into a language that functions as a social art; though he also

[148] Lydia Goehr, "Political Music and the Politics of Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 99.

[149] Lydia Goehr, "Political Music and the Politics of Music," 101-102.

frequently disclaimed responsibility for any political associations of his own work, insisting instead that his compositions were "only" music. When called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities for the charge against him that his music had succored Communist efforts to permeate the motion-picture industry, Eisler contended, "I am not an organizer. I am a composer…I stick to my music."[150] The similarity between Eisler's defense of his practice to the House committee, and Moorman's defense of her *Opera Sextronique* performance to the judge in her trial for indecent exposure charges, is conspicuous. We may recall Moorman's insistence on her role in the *Opera Sextronique* performance as merely an obedient performer who faithfully adhered to the requirements of the score. In Eisler's situation, the committee, though surely confident that his compositions were in fact political, ultimately could not extricate from his music any palpable evidence of such relations. "They were looking, mistakenly, for a concrete relation," Goehr explains, "and though there were clearly examples of such a relation, Eisler found it easy to deny or undermine them. His music was, as perhaps only he knew, political [only] 'in a philosophical sense.'"[151]

That Eisler's music conformed to conventional practices of standard notation and use of traditional instruments granted the composer a discursive invisibility in criticisms of his work. In his personal life, Eisler could endorse political causes, write abundantly on his political views, and advocate for a renegotiation of the art form which would make it inseparable from its social, political, and cultural contexts; but in practice, he could retreat into the domain of the "purely musical," insisting on his music as Absolute, a medium insulated from the contagion outside

[150] "Hearings regarding Hanns Eisler," Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighth Congress, Public Law 601, United States Government Printing Office (Washington, 1967), as quoted in Goehr, "Political Music," 100.

[151] Goehr, "Political Music and the Politics of Music" 110.

world. The nature of Moorman's practice, on the other hand, made such an escape from responsibility impracticable. Because she repudiated, with her literal body, the concept of music as an autonomous intellectual activity which bore no association with its cultural (or corporeal) contexts, Moorman's work appeared within the cultural contexts of the 1960s as urgently political and thus countercultural to the modernist and early postmodernist ideals of the musical avant-garde. Read in a way that acknowledges, rather than denies, these cultural contexts, Moorman's oeuvre emerges as a compelling and relevant contributor to a culturally and politically engaged musical avant-garde.

Of course, reading Moorman's work in this way is both plainly comprehensible yet also problematic in light of her often contradictory positions on the matter. In many cases, Moorman acknowledged the political underpinnings of her performances: asked about *Human Cello*, she straightforwardly remarked, "By playing on Paik I demonstrate how we Americans are oppressing the Vietnamese;"[152] describing the 5th Annual New York Avant Garde Festival, Moorman said "We're just trying to express ourselves. And show our new work. Our generation, with the assassination of Kennedy, the war, the bomb—well, in times like this you just can't expect the kind of art you had before;"[153] and we may also recall her poetic program note for Chiari's *Per Arco* ("i have quite a strange feeling because / i am in the german country / that is bombing italy on the tape / do you recognize your sound / vietnam dominican republic / mississippi!! / i can not keep from crying"). Contrastingly, though, Moorman emphasized a stance of neutrality in explicitly banning "heavy politics" in each of her curated avant-garde

[152] Genrikh Borovik, "Adventures of a Cello: Notes on American 'Avantgardism,'" pt. 2, *Literary Gazette* (Moscow) 7, no. 4242 (February 18, 1970), 15, as quoted in Rothfuss, 114.

[153] Jay Levin, "Where It's Happening—On The Hippiest Ferry," *New York Post,* September 30, 1967, as quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 210.

festivals.[154] And, although Moorman often emphasized her sexuality in performance, she also deemed unacceptable critics' relentless conflation of her work with sex (in the same *Per Arco* program note: "the horrible sounds compel me to / think about war—the audience is / thinking about sex as i touch my cello— / do all roads lead to sex?"). Indeed, the crux of her argument as a defendant in her court trial for indecent exposure lied in her denial of nudity as sexual, and in the rejection of authorial responsibility for *Opera Sextronique*'s content and connotations.

To be clear, my intention is not to posthumously assign Moorman a specific set of political or cultural aims. Her own representation of her motives was equivocal at best, and an attempt to centralize any one of her varied objectives as the overarching bent of her practice would diminish its complexity. Instead, I have demonstrated the ways in which Moorman's practice, as one that was embodied, sexual, and sexualized, fell at odds with the pervasive avant-garde philosophies of music as disembodied and apolitical. Further, I contended that it was the very nature of her work as sexual *through embodiment* and political *through embodiment* which precluded her from serious consideration as a powerful force in the development of the avant-garde. Because her body was so central to her practice, Moorman could not offer the same illusions of personal and political neutrality that composers such as Cage and Eisler did. It is in this light that I have offered a new analysis of her practice as one that is compelling because it represented, rather than transcended, the cultural and sociopolitical contexts within which it originated.

A concern of equal importance which cannot be separated from the musicological discourse on embodiment and the politicization of bodies (and which is of primary interest to McClary, whose work substantially informed this chapter) is the role of gender in musical

[154] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 166.

production and reception. Indeed, much of the discourse in this chapter regarding Moorman's nudity, her subtle and overt subversions of subjectivity/objectivity, and the reversal of prescribed sexual roles beseeches a gendered analysis of her practice. In the following chapter, then, I will explore how Moorman's gender and her expressions of femininity were perceived as problematic in various ways, discuss the possibilities for why her work has so far escaped even a feminist musicological consideration, and suggest a twenty-first century feminist reenvisioning of her oeuvre as one that may now be read as foundational to our current understandings of the American avant-garde.

CHAPTER 4

THE DISOBEDIENT BODY

The Tools One is Expected to Use

As Michel Foucault describes it, "the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power." "It is easy enough," he writes, "to find signs of the attention then paid to the body—to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained; which obeys, responds, becomes skillful, and increases its forces."[155] This concept of the disciplined, civilized body representative of modern Western societies is most apparent when contrasted with its antipode: the unruly body. In the previous chapter, I described the many ways in which Moorman's embodied practice was considered unruly in its defiance of music's ideological identification as disembodied and autonomous. Further, I suggested that Moorman represented, with her real body, in her real life, the "threat" of erotic power which McClary pointed to her in her analysis of Bizet's *Carmen*; Moorman's victim, musicology's insistence on denying the libidinal. As Cynthia Lowenthal notes, "uncivilized bodies were [and are] often assumed to be female bodies," this distinction shaping "the evolution of new, modern definitions of appropriate male and female behavior;"[156] therefore, any discussion of Moorman's practice as disobedient, disruptive, or unruly must take into account the politics of gender therein.

We may begin to explore the ways in which Moorman's sex and gender problematized her career from its earliest roots. In a most elemental sense, Moorman's very decision to play the cello was provocative, for the instrument itself bears a history replete with gender inequities.

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[155] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 136.

[156] Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 18.

Anita Mercier describes the "obvious problems" for nineteenth-century women wishing to play the cello: in a society which dictated that a woman must always "look appealing and never compromise her feminine charm" when playing an instrument, the cello presented a particular obstacle in that it was held between the knees or calves, a spread-legged position considered indecent and immodest for proper women at the time.[157] Women who did play the instrument, then, played from a side-saddle position instead, preserving their decency yet severely limiting their technical capabilities.[158] Margaret Campbell describes the invention of the endpin as revolutionary for women cellists, as it allowed women to "play in a dignified manner," since "no lady would dare to straddle her legs around an instrument in the same way as men."[159] Aside from logistical concerns, musical instruments were stereotyped as "masculine" or "feminine" based on prevailing societal notions of women as the weaker sex. Accompanimental instruments, such as the lute and the harp, were considered feminine with their "soft, delicate plucked string sounds;" whereas soloistic instruments such as the violin or cello, with the requisite "energetic movements and facial distortions," were considered acceptable only for men. Rita Steblin summarizes these views: "...the string instruments often require a quick, vigorous, powerful movement that does not sit well with the recognized weakness of the female sex…thus, these instruments are unsuitable for ladies to play." Given the widespread subscription to this notion, even late into the nineteenth century, Steblin remarks, "It would require a great deal of courage to perform on these 'masculine' instruments in the face of such strong societal pressure."[160]

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[157] Anita Mercier, *Guilhermina Suggia, Cellist* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 1.

[158] George Kennaway, *Playing the Cello, 1780-1930*, (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014), 191.

[159] Margaret Campbell, "Nineteenth Century Virtuosi" in *Cambridge Companion to the Cello*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 64.

[160] Rita Steblin, "The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition," *Canadian University Music Review* 16, no. 1 (1995), 139.

Surely, some of these perceptions abated with time; though, not until 1913 were women allowed to play in major orchestras, and it was even later, in 1930, when a woman first joined an American symphony orchestra.[161] In New York, specifically, only in 1966 did the New York Philharmonic hire double bassist Orin O'Brien as the orchestra's first full-time female musician.[162] Jane Bowers describes the interrelation of women's relegation to the periphery of professional musical activities with "the social/sexual roles assigned to them by the societies in which they lived." "Many women, probably most," she writes, "complied with culturally imposed prescriptions and limitations of their musical activities. Indeed, some women internalized their culturally determined inferiority, and this led to self-deprecation, psychological barriers to creativity, and so forth."[163] Bowers further observes a general pattern of the specific activities deemed acceptable for those women who did participate in music-making. Singing and performing were categorized as women's musical roles, while, dichotomously, playing instruments and composing were reserved for men.

Although Bowers, in her description of these gendered, oppositional categories, was framing a historical period from the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries, such biases endured for decades, persisting and adapting to a twenty-first century landscape. In 2003, the composer/performer Pamela Z described a sort of musical-cultural anxiety surrounding her use of technology in performance:

> The tool that women seem to be expected to excel in using is the human voice. And when we do excel in that, we do get recognition for it. Cathy Berberian, Diamanda Galas, Joan

[161] Cynthia Collins, "Contribution of Women Musicians to Symphony Orchestras," *CMUSE*, March 9, 2015, accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.cmuse.org/contribution-of-women-musicians-to-symphony-orchestras/.

[162] Judy Klemesrud, "Is Women's Lib Coming to the Philharmonic?," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1971, accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/1971/04/11/archives/is-womens-lib-coming-to-the-philharmonic-women-make-music-too.html.

[163] Jane M. Bowers, "Feminist Scholarship and the Field of Musicology: I," College Music Symposium 29 (1989), 85, 87.

> LaBarbara, Meredith Monk, all these women are very respected and well known for their work with this very technically complex instrument. They are much more celebrated than are any of the men who use extended voice as a main component of their work. But Pauline Oliveros, Laetitia Sonami, Annea Lockwood, Laurie Spiegel, Maryanne Amacher, and the many other women who have done great work in both the designing and using of systems for electronic music are much less likely to be mentioned than their male counterparts. The message seems to be "If you want recognition for what you do, you need to stick with the tools you are expected to use."[164]

And, as recently as December 2019, Farah Nayeri concisely summated in The New York Times: "The problem in classical music boils down to gender roles: what society and tradition allowed women to do, and how those roles endured."[165]

Of course, the intersections of women's assigned social and musical roles vary in complexity as do women's individual geographical, economic, and cultural circumstances.[166] In this light, Moorman's southern upbringing is particularly pertinent. As a young woman in Little Rock, Arkansas, Moorman's early life prepared her for a future composed of "everything a woman was supposed to want and need in 1961," Rothfuss observes, including "a husband with prospects, a nice home, children, financial security, [and] social status."[167] Indeed, following her high school graduation, Moorman did seek to begin such a life. In 1953, she met Thomas ("Tommy") Coleman, a double bassist who attended her college and played alongside Moorman in the Shreveport Symphony. The two married in 1958, though Moorman's career ambitions and her move to New York in 1959 placed considerable strain on their relationship, and by the end of

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[164] Pamela Z, "A Tool is a Tool," in *Women, Art and Technology,* ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

[165] Farah Nayeri, "When an Orchestra Was No Place for a Woman," *New York Times*, December 23, 2019, accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/23/arts/music/women-vienna-philharmonic.html.

[166] Susan McClary describes, as one of music history's earliest outliers, Hildegard von Bingen: "The story of Hildegard's career is quite literally miraculous: the result not only of aristocratic privilege, but also of papal and even divine interventions. As a member of noble family, Hildegard had opportunities denied most women, including the coveted option of life in a convent, where - exempted from the duties of childbreaing - she could receive a liberal education." McClary, "Of Patriarchs…And Matriarchs, Too: Susan McClary Assesses the Challenges and Contributions of Feminist Musicology," *The Musical Times* 135, no. 1816 (1994), 365.

[167] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 34.

1962, Tommy filed for an annulment.[168] In an undated letter to Tommy, Moorman gently described her perspective of their growing apart: "I do love you and I guess I always will. [But] there has been some inner compulsion and force that has been driving me on to the point that it has been impossible for me to live as you would have me live;"[169] though Tommy's view, as presented by his lawyer in his request for annulment, was much starker. Moorman, he argued, had "fraudulently promised and represented that she intended to give up a professional career and maintain, provide, and furnish a home as a wife for her husband [...] and have children by the plaintiff."[170] The separation from Tommy seems not to have bothered Moorman much; and, in perspective, seemed inevitable.

After Moorman's move to New York and the finalization of her divorce, she married again; yet in this new relationship, both Moorman and her husband Frank Pileggi resisted culturally normative roles. In striking contrast to Tommy Coleman, the "quiet, even-tempered, tidy, and conservative product of a strict Southern Baptist upbringing,"[171] Frank Pileggi came from a working-class Italian-American family in Brooklyn. Carolee Schneeman described the couple as "dynamic together," recalling "his kind of romantic Brooklyn energy, her Southern, swirling, over-the-top chatter" as perfectly complementary.[172] Pileggi adored Moorman, and in the 1970s, he dutifully took over as her manager, fulfilling administrative tasks, arranging travel, and acting as Moorman's handler and chauffeur. In her feminist critique of women's exclusion

[168] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 33-36.

[169] Charlotte Moorman to Tommy Coleman, undated letter, CMA.

[170] "Action for the Annulment of a Marriage," submitted by Tommy Coleman's attorney Sheldon Hurwitz to the New York State Supreme Court, November 19, 1962, as cited in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 38.

[171] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 22.

[172] Carolee Schneeman, interview by Joan Rothfuss, June 1, 2003, New Paltz, New York, quoted in Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 174.

from musical activity, Bowers writes that historically, "many women accepted the roles they were assigned as musical helpers,"[173] serving as patrons, organizers, and enablers for men's musical work. In the case of Charlotte Moorman and Frank Pileggi, these roles were explicitly reversed. "It is not an exaggeration to say that [Frank] gave Moorman his life," Rothfuss writes. "She took it, and not always gracefully."[174] Moorman needed a partner who would support her ambitions at all costs, and Pileggi provided that for her.

Bowers suggests that, in the face of earlier societal pressures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there were indeed some women who daringly "lived a life beyond the requirements of a prescribed female destiny;"[175] and surely, Moorman embodied this approach in her own time. What Moorman described as her "inner compulsion and force" which drove her away from a domestic life with her husband, coupled with her spirited will toward trusting her instincts and following such compulsions, led to a striking metamorphosis for the former beauty queen from Little Rock. These deviations from conventional norms in her personal life certainly imply that Moorman lived decidedly as a twentieth-century second-wave feminist, having departed from a marriage that failed to suit her ambitions, boldly taken charge of her own career, and enlisted—sometimes thanklessly—the assistance of the men in her life to uphold said career. Should the aim of this paper be to determine whether Moorman *lived* as a feminist, my answer would be a simple "yes."[176] But, as art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau writes, "Whether a woman artist personally describes herself as a feminist is now somewhat beside the point. What

[173] Bowers, "Feminist Scholarship," 87.

[174] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 276.

[175] Bowers, "Feminist Scholarship," 87.

[176] Importantly, Moorman did not self-identify as a feminist, and she reportedly espoused several anti-feminist sentiments, including telling a friend that she thought men were smarter, and better artists, than women. Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 296.

is far more important is what the work is doing, how it operates, whether it exceeds, disturbs, destabilizes, or puts into question its commodity status as trophy, decoration, or fetish."[177] The following sections, then, will explore how Moorman's work both conforms and collides with second-wave feminism and feminist musicological frameworks, and will offer a reframing of her practice within a current feminist musicological context.

A Brief History of Feminism and Feminist Musicology

To begin, a cursory review of feminist musicological frameworks and their relation to mainstream feminism is necessary. Of course, mainstream feminism is most often referred to by its categorization into four "waves,"[178] the earlier waves more unified and easily defined, the later ones more nebulous. The feminist movement emerged in the 1840s at the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, where nearly 200 women gathered to discuss "the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women." This assembly resulted in the reading of a "Declaration of Sentiments" which called upon women to organize and petition for their rights, including the right to vote. The suffragette movement was borne of this convention, and this "first wave" of feminism culminated in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.[179]

Whereas first-wave feminism was dedicated to achieving political equality for women, second-wave (1963–1980s) feminists aimed for social equality, too. Their slogan, "the personal is political," encompassed this focus on changing the existing cultural and societal roles for

[177] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Feminism's Long March," *Art in America* 96, no. 6 (June/July 2007): 67.

[178] The metaphor of feminist movements as "waves" likely began in 1968 when New York Times writer Martha Weinman Lear published her article entitled "The Second Feminist Wave." Martha Weinman Lear, "The Second Feminist Wave," *New York Times*, March 10, 1968, https://www.nytimes.com/1968/03/10/archives/the-second-feminist-wave.html.

[179] *Encyclopedia Britannica,* s.v. "Seneca Falls Convention," accessed January 21, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Seneca-Falls-Convention.

women. Ignited by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, second-wavers fought to earn the right to work outside the home, for reproductive freedom, for equal pay and the allowance for women to hold their own credit cards and mortgages. They loudly disavowed the patriarchal objectification of women, though the movement's gender essentialism and insistence on the binary opposition of male and female aided in solidifying an image of second-wave feminists as "humorless, hairy-legged...angry and man-hating."[180] Perhaps this prevailing image is undeserved; but second-wave feminism does have its faults which deserve the criticism and backlash that began with the rise of the third wave. Indeed, the description of second-wave feminism above may be rightly altered to emphasize, like first-wave feminism, its white, heterosexual, and middle-class orientation; and so the third wave sought to reject and rectify these second-wave tenets rooted in ablism, racism, heterosexism, and classism.[181]

Constance Grady remarks that it is "almost impossible to talk with any clarity about the third wave because few people agree on what the third wave is, when it started, or if it's still going on."[182] Generally, though, third-wave feminism (1991–?) is acknowledged as the decidedly intersectional wave of the movement, owing its use of the word "intersectional" to Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar of gender and critical race theory who coined the term to describe the many ways in which different forms of oppression combine and intersect with one another.[183] In addition to Crenshaw's work, the third wave also drew upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity—the idea that sex is separate from gender, and that gender is performative—to

[180] Constance Grady, "The Waves of Feminism, and Why People Keep Fighting Over Them, Explained," *Vox,* July 20, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth.

[181] Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[182] Grady, "The Waves of Feminism."

[183] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

include a push for transgender rights as an integral part of this new, intersectional feminism. Grady also comments on the third wave's reclamation of the word "girl" and its manifestations within the movement. Whereas second-wave feminists fought to be called "women" rather than "girls" as a signal of respect, third-wave feminists embraced girlhood and girliness, emphasizing femininity as a strength. "Third-wave feminism had an entirely different way of talking and thinking than the second wave did," Grady writes. "And in part, [embracing girliness] was born out of a belief that the *rejection* of girliness was in itself misogynistic: girliness, third-wavers argued, was not inherently less valuable than masculinity or androgyny."[184] Third-wave feminism recognized the forms of sexist oppression that second-wave predecessors had fought against, yet, enlightened and inspired by notions of intersectionality, the third wave reified calls for a more inclusive feminism that prioritized women of color, working-class and poor women, disabled women, and trans women while celebrating expressions of femininity, sexuality, and feminine pleasure as separate from male desire.[185]

Just as the third wave is somewhat amorphously defined, the fourth wave (2012–),[186] which is taking shape at the time of this dissertation's writing, is similarly complex in its origin and aims. The fourth wave confronts many of the same issues as the third wave, but with the aid of technology and social media campaigns, such as the #MeToo (2016–) and Time's Up (2018–) movements. The fourth wave is not organized according to one unified goal (voting rights or

[184] Grady, "The Waves of Feminism."

[185] Jennifer Gilley, "Writings of the Third Wave: Young Feminists in Conversation," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2005): 187-98.

[186] Though the origins of the fourth wave are debatable, for the purposes of this project, I regard Laura Bates's online "Everyday Sexism Project," where tens of thousands of women shared their experiences of street harassment, sexual harassment, and body-shaming, as its beginning. See Kira Cochrane, "The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women," *The Guardian*, December 10, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women.

equal pay, for instance), but rather it tackles the pervasive, deep-rooted cultural biases and inequities that are more difficult to quantify. The fourth wave is not a monolith, Grady writes, but there are certain elements of a fourth-wave feminism that seem to hold true: "namely, that fourth-wave feminism is queer, sex-positive, trans-inclusive, body-positive, and digitally driven."[187]

The emergence and development of feminist musicology mirrors the trajectory of mainstream feminism's "waves," though, as McClary notes, "feminism has been very late in making an appearance in music criticism."[188] Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that the publication of McClary's *Feminine Endings* in 1991 triggered an entirely new subset of musicology. It is nearly impossible to overstate the significance and impact of McClary's *Feminine Endings*. Sally Macarthur, another prominent and pioneering voice in feminist musicological scholarship, writes:

> [In *Feminine Endings*], McClary struck out at (the untouchable) Beethoven...Debates peppered with vitriol ensued. Anger and outrage were expressed: mainstream musicology was at a loss to understand how the canonic composers could be subjected to such disparaging critiques. Questions were asked about whether music could sustain the kind of analysis McClary was proposing and, indeed, whether the lure of integrating music analysis with feminist and cultural studies would make music somehow less of a 'music thing' and more of a 'cultural thing.' Almost singlehandedly, McClary put feminist scholarship on the musicological map. The scale of the reaction to her work, positive and negative, was unprecedented.[189]

Prior to the publication of *Feminine Endings*, musicologists had responded to second-wave feminist calls for equal recognition for women: in the 1970s, a few historians uncovered the music of women composers such a Hildegard von Bingen, Barbara Strozzi, Clara Schumann,

[187] Grady, "The Waves of Feminism."

[188] McClary, "Terminal Prestige," 73.

[189] Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 100-101.

Ethel Smyth, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and others. Additionally, histories of women in music performance and education were brought to light, as well as the histories of cultural and societal conditions which had served to exclude women from participating in music.[190] Though a benevolent pursuit, this mission to forage for evidence of women in music and insert narratives of a select group of talented women musicians into our music history textbooks is certainly a far cry from what might be considered current feminist musicological scholarship. Nevertheless, these efforts did constitute some of the very first responses from the field of musicology to the mainstream feminist movement.[191]

If the aforementioned practice is considered musicology's own "first wave" of feminism, then the publication of McClary's *Feminine Endings* ushered in a radical new "second wave" approach. In her text, McClary presents a multifaceted feminist perspective of gender, sexuality, and eroticism in classical music, along with a critique of musicology's denial of such constructions. A critical musicology, McClary insists, must take into account music's cultural nuances including those pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, and class; and this type of study, she argues, is an inherently feminist one. In the years following, several of McClary's contemporaries wrote from similar perspectives.[192] From the 1990s and into the early aughts, feminist musicology, though not immune to pushback and criticism, enjoyed somewhat of a golden era: in addition to the books and collections listed in the previous footnote, there were a

[190] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 5.

[191] For a more detailed account of these early efforts by feminist musicologists, see Susan McClary, "Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 3 (1993): 399-423.

[192] Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musicological Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993 [2000]); Ruth Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Susan Cook and Judy Tsou (eds), *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

number of articles published by such key figures as McClary, Ruth Solie, and Suzanne Cusick, including Cusick's "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism" chapter which has greatly influenced my work here.[193] Just as mainstream feminism's second wave was sparked by a hallmark text (Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*) and strengthened by a unified majority focus on a central aim (social equality for women), so too was musicology's own "second wave," with its own igniting text (McClary's *Feminine Endings*) and aims (a critical feminist musicology).

In 2004, Marcia Citron published her article, "Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research," wherein she reflected on her pedagogical and research experiences as a "mostly second-wave" feminist working in a third- or fourth-wave era. Citron describes her perspectives of musicology's own feminist waves: "The 1970s and 1980s...was a time of discovery, recuperation, and dissemination: identifying the who, what, when, and where, and doing editions and recordings of forgotten works," which fits within what I outlined as musicology's first wave. She continues to describe how feminism in musicology became more complex and nuanced in the 1990s, when "the recuperative work waned…[and] studies on women [in music] became more broad based culturally,"[194] an observation that tracks with Macarthur's illustration of how McClary's 1991 *Feminine Endings* publication altered the field. Just as mainstream third-wave feminists organized partly around a rejection of problematic second-wave sentiments, a third wave of feminist musicology, according to Citron, appears to be organized in opposition to the second wave's recuperative efforts because of the propensity of such efforts to portray women as victims, which often resulted in tokenization. Rather than

[193] Suzanne Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-498.

[194] Marcia Citron, "Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research," *Women and Music: A Journal of Culture* 8, no. 1 (2004), 48.

defining a third wave, then, Citron poses questions about what one might entail.

Sally Macarthur, writing later (in 2010) and much more bluntly, argues instead that feminist musicology fully retreated as it reached the end of the *Feminine Endings* golden era:

> It would seem that [musicology] has refused to embrace the changes that so captivated the imagination of the 'new' musicologists (triggered by McClary's book) whose work could potentially have had a de-territorializing effect on the discipline as a whole. Instead, the 'old' musicology bunkered down and waited for the storms to calm and, when it reemerged with its positivist work ready to go, it systematically pulled the 'new' musicology back into line. [...] With even more sting in their tail, the 'master' discourses have returned, appearing in journals such as *Music Analysis*. Mainstream musicology has taken control again [with] firm beliefs about whose music and musicology (really) counts. It could be the case that women's music is forever 'left out' or just simply 'left.'[195]

Macarthur's perspective of the stark decline in the amount of research on women in music is supported by the data produced in a 2017 study by the author and her colleagues in which they surveyed the literature to find that, from 1980 to 2016, more than one-third of the reviewed texts were published in the first half of the 1990s, followed by a steep decrease in the 2000s to only 20%. Importantly, the authors note a promising increase in the years 2010 to 2016, speculating that "before the end of this decade it is likely that there will be an even greater increase in the amount of work undertaken in this field."[196]

Robin James similarly notes that "it appears as if *feminism* was a thing that happened in music scholarship in the 1990s…[and is] no longer necessary and perhaps a sign of un-scholarly bias in favor of women."[197] Yet, in contrast to Macarthur's perspective that feminist musicology had "fully retreated" by the end of the 1990s, James suggests that feminism in music research

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[195] Macarthur, *Toward a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics,* 105-106.

[196] Sally Macarthur, Dawn Bennett, Talisha Goh, Sophie Hennekam, & Cat Hope, "The Rise and Fall, and Rise (Again) of Feminist Research in Music: 'What Goes Around Comes Around,'" *Musicology Australia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 16-17.

[197] Robin James, "Music and Feminism in the 21st Century," *Music Research Annual* 1 (2020): 3.

both evolved to become a type of "postfeminism," where music scholarship "informed by liberal feminist values [is] acceptable, but explicit commitments to feminism [are not];"[198] and that it migrated instead to the field of popular music studies. "Popular music is commonly devalued in the same way that women and girls are devalued," James writes, "through association with feminized and feminizing traits, like superficiality and embodiment;"[199] this phenomenon making *popular music studies* more welcoming of feminist research than musicology studies at large. Though she does not explicitly refer to mainstream feminism's "waves" in her research, James does suggest that many of the (fourth-wave) feminist concerns are impacting current feminist musicological scholarship: issues of queer and trans studies, sexual harassment and assault, and racial capitalism.

Table 4.1: Timeline Comparison of Mainstream Feminism to Feminist Musicology

Mainstream Feminism	Feminist Musicology
First wave: 1848–1920	
Second wave: 1963–1980s	First wave: 1970s–1980s
Third wave: 1991–2010s	Second wave: 1991–2010s
Fourth wave: 2012–?	Third wave: 2012–?

If we are mapping feminist musicology's trajectory onto mainstream feminism's "waves," [Table 3.1] the simplest description of how the two interact is that musicology is consistently one wave behind the mainstream: the recuperative efforts of "first wave" 1970s to 1980s feminist musicology were, in part, a response to mainstream second-wave feminism's calls for social equality for women; the "new," "critical" second wave of feminist musicology ushered in by McClary's book in 1991 responded concurrently to mainstream third-wave

[198] James, "Music and Feminism," 3.

[199] Ibid.

feminism's intersectional aims.[200] Perhaps we are now mirroring that amorphous space within mainstream feminism's third and fourth waves, where the movement's demands are decentralized, multiplicitous, and harder to name. Certainly, it is difficult to label where musicology stands in its feminist trajectory and its current alignment with mainstream feminism; though, as James's research shows, there is undoubtedly a new (feminist musicological) "wave" taking shape, responding to the concerns of fourth-wave feminism.[201] Perhaps this new wave is forming what feminist art critic Katy Deepwell describes as "the opening of a shared space in which feminisms (in their multiplicity) can be discussed"[202] in ways other than how they function as musicology's "other."[203] In the following section, I will explore Moorman's work within the context of this feminist musicological trajectory to discuss how a retrospective reframing of her practice may be helpful in opening up such a space.

A Reframing Beyond Binarisms

I want to begin by revisiting Suzanne Cusick's theory of musicology's Mind/Body problem, but in light of its feminist implications rather than for the critique it brings to the Schoenbergian concept of music as an autonomous, intellectual object free from the intrusion of the sensate body. In Chapter 2, I described Cusick's argument that one of musicology's greatest

[200] For a discussion on the terms "new musicology" and "critical musicology," see Fred E. Maus, "What Was Critical Musicology," *Radical Musicology* 5 (2011), accessed December 14, 2020, http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/special_critmus/maus.htm.

[201] In 2012, Susan McClary called upon scholars to "ROCK THE BOAT!" and create "another wave to push feminist music studies to the next level" in her keynote address for the twentieth anniversary of the Feminist Theory and Music conference. For the purposes of this project, I recognize this keynote as the beginning of feminist musicology's "third wave." Susan McClary, "Making Waves: Opening Keynote for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Feminist Theory and Music Conference," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 16 (2012), 96.

[202] Katy Deepwell, "Art Criticism and the State of Feminist Art Criticism," *Arts* 9, no. 1 (March 2020): 13.

[203] Macarthur similarly suggests that, "for feminist musicology to make a come-back, it would want to be appropriately vigilant but would also compose itself as a musicology of assemblages, intent on exploring the connections between zones and territories in the discipline with the purpose of inspiring new ways of thinking about women's music." Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music*, 108.

faults is its reliance on the inherited tradition of separating music's texted components from "the very thing that makes music music," its embodied performance. Here, her exploration of music's Mind/Body problem through a feminist-attuned lens becomes relevant. Whereas this Cartesian paradigm regards music's scholarship as "mind" and performance as "body," the former hierarchically superior, these distinctions, Cusick argues, are also inherently gendered. The masculine "Mind" is prioritized over the feminine "Body," mirroring our patriarchal society.[204] As a solution to this problematic phenomenon, Cusick suggests that a feminist music theory must reintegrate the Mind with the Body, acknowledging performers as "knowers whose knowledge comes from their bodies and their minds (knowers whose pleasures come from their bodies and their minds)"as a counterpart to the composer's knowledge which is taken for granted as an "all-encompassing, and thus objective" knowledge.[205]

This framework provides a new way of interpreting Moorman's decades-long relationship with John Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player.* We may recall from the previous discussion of her engagement with the piece that Moorman's interpretation of the work was florid and ever-changing, and that Cage disparaged her for performing it in a way that "didn't have anything to do with the piece itself."[206] Applying Cusick's analysis of the Mind/Body problem and its implications, Cage's sentiment betokens his privileged position within the mind/body, composer/performer, knowing/unknowing power structures of the medium. Within these power structures, Cage's remarks are granted discursive immunity: when music is reduced to a "mind-mind game," as Cusick describes, and the composer is understood as "mind," his

[204] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 8-27.

[205] Cusick, "Feminist Theory," 19, 16.

[206] Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman," in *Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology*, ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), n.p.

version of the music is the only one that counts. If, however, we heed Cusick's call for a radical reintegration of the Body and Mind which includes "theorizing about (and analyzing with great care) the practices of bodies (real ones) as well as the practices of minds,"[207] then we must consider the layers of the work's meaning within Moorman's performances of it.

Cusick suggests that a reintegrated feminist music theory might interrogate the social and symbolic meanings inherent in the performer's bodily techniques used to produce sounds. Further, she posits the question, "How are individual self-control and submission to discipline displayed as a social performance, an acting out of individuals' relationships to others whose scripts may allow them greater or lesser social power?" Here, Moorman's preparation and performance of the piece becomes a site of contestation and dialogue. As previously mentioned, the score for *26'1* makes incredible demands of its performers, many of those musical demands countering the instincts of a classically trained cellist. Piekut takes note of this, writing, "Instead of matching a crescendo with a movement of the bow slightly down toward the bridge...Cage might ask for extreme pressure with the wood of the bow over the fingerboard, followed quickly by lighter pressure with the hair, close to the bridge. Little in a cellist's training would have prepared her for such physically awkward musical gestures."[208] In submitting herself to these demands, Moorman acts out her position as weakened (the subordinate performer) in relation to the social power awarded to Cage (the dominant composer).

Cusick writes that there are two "messages" which are integral to a work's meaning: one, a message from the composer's mind to the listener's mind, and the other, a message from the composer's mind *through the body of the performer* to the performer's mind. If the message

[207] Cusick, "Feminist Theory," 17.

[208] Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 148.

from Cage to Moorman is one of dominance and submission, then a critical analysis of Moorman's own additions to the score enlightens. At its core, what I have called musicology's "second wave" feminist approach urges us to recognize the ways in which culture surrounds and affects music's conception, performance, and reception; thus, this analysis will take into account the synchronicity of mainstream second-wave feminism's undercurrents.

In the ways that I examined Moorman's extra-musical additions to the *26'1* score in Chapters 2 and 3 to suggest that her work had become inherently personal and political, here I recall them within Cusick's framework to analyze them through a feminist lens. Within this framework, it is tempting to read these extra-musical additions as pointed assertions of Moorman's *own* dominance in response to the "message" the Cage piece thrust upon her body. Perhaps her mid-performance reading of the Tampax tampon insertion instructions, or the Planned Parenthood advertisement, served as a declaration of second-wave feminist demands for women's sexual and reproductive freedom. Perhaps Moorman's use of a half-nude and kneeling Paik, in place of her cello, was a pronouncement of feminine power—an intentional subversion of patriarchal norms. This line of thinking becomes problematic though, when we consider her inclusion of domestic items and chores, for instance, running a blender, cooking mushrooms, or frying eggs, given that second-wave feminism was rooted in the anger women levied against the systemic sexism that had, among other things, relegated them to the confines of domestic labor. Was Moorman offering a critique of the expectation of women's domesticity, or was she complicit in it?

This question is central to understanding why feminists at the time rejected Moorman's practice as worthy of consideration. In 1969, Moorman and Paik began collaborating on their *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*. Of course, this work followed the premiere and ensuing legal battles

over her nudity in *Opera Sextronique* (1967), so it may be read as a snide "solution" to the artists' "problem" of Moorman performing topless. With the two tiny television sets covering her breasts, Moorman could perform, "clothed" in the TV Bra, yet in a way that was perhaps even more encouraging of salacious spectatorship as the screens drew the audience gaze directly to her chest. Additionally, as Rothfuss notes, this 1969 collaboration also followed one of the second-wave feminist movement's hallmark events: the (symbolic) bra-burning. In response to the 1968 Miss America Pageant, a small group of women protested the "degrading image of women perpetuated by the Miss America pageant," creating a "Freedom Trash Can" into which the protestors tossed "instruments of torture" such as their bras, girdles, hairspray, high-heeled shoes, false eyelashes, hair curlers, and other signifiers of of stereotypical femininity.[209] Although no bras were actually burned in this protest, the image of the angry, bra-burning feminist took hold and became a widespread symbol of militant second-wave feminism, making Moorman's decision to embark on this new piece with Paik all the more perplexing. Why choose to put *on* a bra when the world's feminists were (symbolically) burning theirs?

Moorman's nudity in performance furthered the schism between her work and the work of her feminist contemporaries. Of course, feminist artists in the 1960s and 1970s turned to the body as an expressive tool and a central medium through which to reclaim their bodies from the objectification of the male gaze.[210] And of course, Moorman regarded her body as an expressive tool, too. Of *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, she remarked, "*TV Bra* is one third of [the piece], I'm

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[209] Adryan Corcione, "Bra Burning as a Feminist Ritual, Debunked," *Teen Vogue*, September 27, 2018, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/bra-burning-feminist-ritual-debunked-og-history. For more on the 1968 protest and the perpetuation of the bra-burning myth, see Joseph Campbell, *Getting It Wrong: Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[210] In Schneeman's words, "Women artists explore erotic imagery because our bodies exemplify a historic battleground--we are dismantling conventional sexual ideology and its punishing suppressions--and because our experience of our bodies has not corresponded to cultural depiction." Carolee Schneeman, "The Obscene Body/Politic," *Art Journal* 50, no. 4 (Winter, 1991), 28.

one third of it, and my cello is one third of it. When we're all together, the work is complete."[211] Where Moorman differed, though, is in her willingness to use her body *at the direction* of male composers, rather than of her own accord. On several occasions, Moorman emphasized that she always intended to do what composers requested, even when that meant "toplessness and other aspects of nudity." She doubled down on her role as the subservient performer, and speculated that people would not "understand Paik for sixty years." "But," she remarked, "I have a duty to him as a composer."[212]

For comparison, we may observe the following statements from Carolee Schneeman, the feminist body artist and friend of Moorman's who made the initial suggestion that Moorman perform nude in the 1964 production of Stockhausen's *Originale*. Schneeman was an early participant in the Fluxus group, but she was ousted from their ranks after a disagreement with Fluxus leader George Maciunus. Of her Fluxus exile, Schneeman writes:

> In 1963 to use my body as an extension of my painting-constructions was to challenge and threaten the psychic territorial lines by which women were admitted to the Art Stud Club, so long as they behaved ENOUGH like the man, did work clearly in the traditions and pathways hacked out by the man. [...] The use of my own body as integral to my work was confusing to many people. I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN SELF-IMAGE. If I had only been dancing, acting, I would have maintained forms of feminine expression acceptable to the culture.[213]

Here, Schneeman recognizes that in order to present her body as her own, rather than as a tool or an object of male desire, she had to altogether reject the male viewpoint of Fluxus, and so she was ousted from the group for her strong opinions. Moorman was unwilling (or unable) to

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[211] Charlotte Moorman, Sydney press conference, March 21, 1976, as quoted in Rothfuss, 245.

[212] Paul O'Neil, "Nudity in Public," *Life* 63, no. 15 (October 13, 1967): 116. CMA.

[213] Carolee Schneeman, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 1997), 52, 194. Emphasis in the original.

embody such a stance.[214] It is interesting, especially in the context of McClary's and Cusick's work, that Schneeman suggests dancing and acting as "forms of feminine expression acceptable to the culture." As previously noted, music performance (as opposed to composition) has been relegated to the periphery as "women's work" for centuries; surely, it could be added to Schneeman's list.

As another example, the Fluxus artist Alison Knowles, whom Paik had initially hoped would become his willing-to-strip muse, recalled her own interactions with the composer and his *Serenade for Alison*: "[The Paik piece] made me isolate an aspect of myself and present it as if it was especially important. Meaning, the femaleness of my body. Emphasizing the objectness of woman was not my way."[215] Of Moorman, she remarked, "She was always this girl from Arkansas, this wonderful child in a dress, holding flowers—so when someone tells her to take off her clothes, she takes off her clothes, and when someone tells her to go naked into the water, and she'll do it [sic]. It was thoughtless."[216] The words of other radical feminists were even harsher: Martha Rosler diminished Moorman's role as "an instrument that plays itself" in service of Paik's homage to "other famous male artist-magicians or seers (quintessentially, Cage);"[217] and Andrea Dworkin called Moorman a "harlot" and her career "a process of extended rape."[218]

Here, I would like to suggest that Moorman was a victim of her medium. Her method of

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[214] Moorman was also linked to Fluxus for some time, but was "almost immediately cast out," Rothfuss observes. Her conflict with Fluxus chairman Maciunas was not over the use of her body; rather, Maciunas believed Moorman's Avant Garde Festivals "poached" Fluxus artists and undermined his efforts to build an international Fluxus collective. Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 95.

[215] Alison Knowles, interview with Joan Rothfuss, November 16, 2002, New York City. Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 89.

[216] Alison Knowles, interview with Gisela Gronemeyer, December 13, 1991, New York City. Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication," unpaginated.

[217] Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," in *Illuminated Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990), 45.

[218] Brian Morton, "Candy-Coated, Gravity-Defying, Streamline Baby," *Wire*, September 2007, 25.

working—a method cast upon her by the longstanding traditions of classical music training—was problematic for second-wave feminists. By submitting herself to an "acceptably feminine" role (as a performer, a neutral conduit for the communication of male composers' ideas), she was seen by feminists, in the contexts of the sexual liberation movement and second-wave feminism, as a counter-feminist who played into the very roles from which they sought to liberate women. Ironically, her subtle subversions of this paradigm, I suggest, also precluded her from serious musicological consideration. If a critical feminist musicology is organized, in part, around deconstructing the rigid binarisms of mind/body, composer/performer, knowing/unknowing structures of the medium, then what to make of a shapeshifting artist like Moorman, who identified as a performer yet often acted as collaborator and co-composer, and whose body, spirit, and mind were so inextricably intertwined with the works she championed?

Saba Mahmood, in her 2005 book *Politics of Piety*, describes the nuanced and contradictory position women musicians inhabit, writing of a virtuoso pianist:

> [She] submits herself to the often painful regime of disciplinary practice, as well as to the hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, in order to acquire the ability—the requisite agency—to play an instrument with mastery. Importantly, her agency is predicated upon her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as "docility."[219]

This concept that women musicians must first subscribe to a subservient role within an inherently patriarchal system in order to then subvert and transcend that system maps directly onto Moorman's practice. Viewing her work from this perspective allows for an exploration of her career through the multiplicities of a current feminism; that is, a sex-positive feminism which exists beyond the second wave's imperative to subvert and critique the aforementioned binarisms.

[219] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005 [2011]), 29.

A second-wave feminist reading of Moorman's performances of Kosugi's *Chamber Music (Anima 2)* (1962), for instance, might criticize the artist for offering a seductive show of femininity and sexuality which catered to the male gaze as she writhed around in the cloth "chamber" on the floor, selectively exposing her body in varied states of undress. This criticism might be strengthened by the fact that *Chamber Music*, like nearly all the other pieces in her repertoire, was written by a male composer; thus, it is arguable that she was acting only in accordance with the instructions handed down to her by an authoritative male figure, rather than by her own accord. Perhaps this fits with what Schneeman might have called "work[ing] clearly in the traditions and pathways hacked out by the man," so as not to "threaten the psychic territorial lines by which women were admitted to the Art Stud Club." A current feminist interpretation, though, might instead view these performances as displaying the empowerment of a woman who expressed her sexuality as independent from—and in control of—male desire. Moorman's work on the piece allowed her to dictate every detail of a decidedly erotic scene, teasing her audiences with selective nudity and suggestive positions, yet withholding any sense of final gratification. In this way, audiences become onlookers to a woman's own intimacy, witnessing her complete charge over her own body and the body of her cello, in a scene of empowered female sexuality.

Similarly, a selection of Moorman's performances of the *Variation on a Theme by Saint-Saëns* (1964), when viewed from a twenty-first century feminist perspective, depict an image of a decidedly feminine (or, as second-wavers may bemoan, "girly") woman whose pleasure is derived not in opposition to male desire, but in taking control of it. Wrapped in a sheet of clear plastic, Moorman teased audiences with near, but not total nudity. In performance, she demonstrated a reversal of prescribed sexual roles, positioning one male audience member on his

hands and knees, his back used as a stool for Moorman; and another lying on the ground, her cello's endpin in his mouth. Here, Moorman was not only an autonomous performer with agency of her own; she was in a power position traditionally reserved, in a patriarchal society, for men. She controlled their bodies and manipulated their presumed desires. She frustrated sexual tensions and decided if and when to provide resolution—a move bolstered by the musical tension she generated when she paused on the dominant V chord of the Saint-Saëns piece to emerge herself in the water-filled oil drum before returning to complete the movement.

The ways in which Moorman's practice problematized second-wave feminism are clear, as are, I hope, the ways in which a current feminist reading may reconfigure her work in order to view it as prototypical to a feminism which is body-positive, sex-positive, and unapologetically feminine. Having offered these explanations and possibilities, I now return to the original musicological issue; that is, the question of why feminist musicology has not yet taken up Moorman's practice as an object of discourse—a site for exploration of a complex and multiplicitous feminism in music. As McClary notes, one warranted criticism of feminist musicology is that it often focuses so heavily on the music's social contexts within which a piece acquires its meaning that it fails to deal with the music itself in adequate detail.[220] This is where the complexity of what Moorman's practice *is* obfuscates a musicological (feminist or not) reading of it.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the embodied nature of Moorman's practice rendered her specific body, in her specific time, as inseparable from the work itself. Moorman used her body in performance in ways that disrupted prevailing notions of music as an autonomous object, in

[220] Susan McClary, "Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism in the 1990s," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 399-423.

that, by her startling nudity or through the "humanized" (sexualized) technologies, her body was overtly objectified. This realization might fit nicely into a second-wave feminist musicological critique wherein one observes, as I previously did in discussion of the Cage piece, the ways in which the music "itself" thrusts its inherent (masculine) dominance upon the performer who has submitted herself to its telling. However, Moorman demonstrated an agency in performance that precludes such an analysis. This agency is evidenced concretely in the generative, collaborative, co-compositional role she inhabited;[221] but more subtly, her body (separate from her mind) was also granted agency in performance. In both the *TV Cello* and *TV Glasses*, for instance, these technological apparatuses were made to respond to "Moorman's flesh-and-blood corpus,"[222] her eyes both receiving and transmitting images through the glasses, her corporeal movements distorting the televisual images in real time. Similarly, in McWilliams's *Ice Music* (1972), Moorman's body was simultaneously both the object and subject of performance, her body warmth enacting upon, and responding to, the presence of the cello-shaped block of ice. In this way, Moorman's body, and the ways in which it produced sound, image, and meaning in real time, became the "music itself." This perspective enlightens the trouble second-wave feminist musicology might encounter in an analysis of Moorman's work. A criticism that seeks to uncover the "message" of the music through the experience of the performer does not fully account for the complexity of this message when the performer is also author; yet, an analysis of the "music itself," and how that music inflicts action upon its performers, breaks down where the performer herself becomes it.

[221] For instance, the *TV Cello*, though attributed to Paik as its creator, was actually Moorman's idea. She conceived the idea for the piece, and over a period of time, made requests for changes to its design to better reflect what she had in mind. Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist,* 265-268.

[222] Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, 267.

Additionally, as Robin James notes, explicitly "feminist" research in musicology has, in recent years, migrated toward the field of popular music studies; this phenomenon proving unsurprising in that popular music is discursively associated with "feminine and feminizing" traits "such as superficiality, association with the body over the mind, simplicity and deficient mastery, formulaic obedience, and so on."[223] As discussed in Chapter 3, the reigning philosophies of the musical avant-garde exist in total opposition to these traits, insisting instead upon avant-garde music as serious, intellectual, disembodied, and complex; thus, it is similarly unsurprising that the traditionally masculinist scholarship of the avant-garde has mostly precluded a feminist musicological approach. Moorman's work, then, offers an opportunity to bring these two genealogies together. Indeed, much of Moorman's performance practice might be considered "pop," in that it referenced pop culture/capitalism and superficiality, was inherently embodied, favored simplicity over proficient mastery (in that, for instance, she set aside her Juilliard training to play melodies as simple as "The Swan"), and played with notions of dominance/submission and thus obedience/disobedience. Moorman herself acknowledged this aspect of her work, writing in 1965, "my interpretation of Cage's *26'1.1499" for a String Player* is very american—a kind of pop music."[224] Moorman was working within a decidedly anti-pop culture medium, yet she unapologetically imbued her performances with pop culture references. In utilizing a current feminist musicological approach which acknowledges the "feminine and feminizing" traits of Moorman's performance practice as valuable to its meaning *within* (rather than in contrast to) the contexts of the musical avant-garde, Moorman's work becomes a productive site for an integration of feminist musicological scholarship into studies of the

[223] James, "Music and Feminism," 6.

[224] Charlotte Moorman, "Cello," in *24 Stunden*, ed. Joseph Beuys, n.p (Itehoe Vosskate: Hansen and Hansen, 1965). Reprinted in Bonomo, *Cello Anthology*, n.p.

American musical avant-garde.

Summarily, in the ways that Moorman's embodied performance practice earned her reputation as a counter-feminist against the backdrop of mainstream second-wave feminism, the nature of her work also precludes an explicitly second-wave feminist musicological reading of it. Because Moorman neither fully submitted to, nor subverted, the paradigms against which the second-wave feminist musicology of the 1990s traditionally positioned itself, the frameworks set forth by McClary, Cusick, et al do not fully account for the nuanced complexities of her work. In a way, both Moorman and these feminist musicologists of the 1990s were working on the same "project"—that is, to dissolve the binarisms of mind/body, composer/performer, and knowing/unknowing in musical performance; and, ironically, it is precisely because Moorman's work obscured these boundaries that it also precludes a squarely second-wave feminist musicological reading of it. It is here that a reframing of Moorman's practice through a current, intersectional, and multiplicitous feminist lens allows for a reconsideration of her work as powerful because of—not in spite of—her gender.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> *Paik does give me instructions, and then half of the piece is his, and the other half is mine. And what I do with it is up to me.*
>
> —Charlotte Moorman

In her career, Charlotte Moorman crafted an oeuvre that blurred the lines between her life, her body, and her work. Her practice evolved to become one that was inherently and irrevocably embodied, bringing into focus the dynamics of corporeality, the feminine body, female nudity and sexuality, and the gendered politics of dominance and submission within the contexts of musical performance. Ironically, it was this same radical approach, which had initially earned Moorman her reputation as a bold and daring performance artist for whom some of the avant-garde's most esteemed artists and composers would write, that would lead to her posthumous occlusion from music's written histories of the American avant-garde. Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have explored the ways in which Moorman's practice fell at odds with music's identification as autonomous, intellectual, disembodied, and apolitical; and I have suggested that her work troubles even a traditional feminist musicological analysis, as she never fully submitted to nor subverted the inherited (patriarchal) paradigms within classical music.

Additionally, I grappled with the fact that Moorman's stated aims often contradict an image of the artist as having any such intention: in a 1975 profile for the *New Yorker*, Moorman said, "Sometimes I feel Paik doesn't really think of me as Charlotte Moorman. He looks on me as a work of his;"[225] five years later, she expressed a different perspective, saying, "All these pieces are half-mine. That's what the world finally has realized now. In performance these are

[225] Calvin Tomkins, "Profile: Video Visionary," *The New Yorker* (May 5, 1975), accessed August 31, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1975/05/05/video-visionary.

not Nam June Paik pieces, but Nam June Paik/Charlotte Moorman pieces. They are collaborations;"[226] and yet later, in 1983, she reversed course again, telling scholar Edith Decker-Phillips, "[Paik] can do with me what he pleases, and I'm very honored about the whole thing."[227] Presumably, Moorman's shifting perspective centered around her thoughts on who should receive authorial credit for her work with Paik, given the co-compositional nature of their pieces. Here, though, I suggest that Moorman's contributions—her "other half"— extended far beyond coauthorship. Surely, her conscious efforts in the conception, revision, and performance of Paik's pieces deserve credit; but a retrospective visibility of her work which takes into account the intersectional and compounding associations of her body in performance offers a view of the artist as one with the posthumous potential to reframe and reconstruct our current understandings of music in the postwar avant-garde and beyond.

Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock recently reified her idea that "women are generally missing from conventional stories of the avant-garde" and posed the question: "Why has modernist culture been so unable imaginatively to integrate women's creativity into its narratives?"[228] In her own reframing of art history's avant-garde, Pollock challenges the imperative to view its development as a temporally linear series of events, and suggests instead a recontextualizing of "discontinuous avant-garde *moments*"[229] as integral to a current understanding of art's modernist histories. Whereas the former approach has favored a masculinist artist-as-hero narrative, Pollock suggests, a reintegration of avant-garde "moments,"

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[226] Gisela Gronemeyer, "Seriousness and Dedication: The American Avant-Garde Cellist Charlotte Moorman," in *Charlotte Moorman: Cello Anthology*, ed. Gabriele Bonomo (Milan, Italy: Alga Marghen, 2006), unpaginated.

[227] Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video* (Barrytown, NY: Barryton Ltd, 1998), 146.

[228] Griselda Pollock, "Moments and Temporalities of the Avant-Garde 'in, of, and from the feminine,'" *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010), 795.

[229] Pollock, "Moments and Temporalities," 796. Emphasis in original.

particularly those which were attentive to gender and sexual difference, allows for a retelling of the avant-garde as it emerges "in, of, and from the feminine." I find Pollock's framework a productive site for examining Moorman's oeuvre as one that was inarguably revolutionary regardless of her intentions. Whether she did or did not aim to test the limits of what might be considered "music," "performance," or even a "cello," Moorman's performances, within the contexts of her medium and of her time, became these "moments" which generated analytical tension and problematized a proper musical-historical contextualization of her work.

In this light, Moorman may be viewed as an architect of the avant-garde, not only because of her important work as the director of her fifteen New York Avant Garde Festivals, but also because her practice provides a new way of perceiving the musical avant-garde. By reintegrating Moorman's "moments" as central to a historical narrative of the musical avant-garde, her work provides a pathway for conceiving a new comprehension of the genre which acknowledges the role of the body, the contributions of women and women performers, and the importance of interrelated issues of sex, gender, and politics in the conception, performance, and reception of avant-garde music.

Further, whereas the nature of Moorman's work as often overtly sexual/sexualized calls into immediate conversation the embodiment of her performances, the questions that are raised by such discourse are applicable to more nuanced practices. The implications of validating her approach as significant *because* it was embodied (and therefore sexual/sexualized, political/politicized) extend beyond her specific practice and beyond the avant-garde era to offer a platform for an embodied critical analysis of music performance as pertaining to issues other than those discussed here; for instance, those of race, class, geography, and non-heteronormative variances in sexual orientation and gender identity. Indeed, the impact of Moorman's specific

work has influenced current discourse. Caitlin Schmid, writing in 2020, described three performances of McWilliams's *Ice Music*: Moorman's 1972 premiere, a restaging by cellist Joan Jeanrenaud in 2001, and another restaging by cellist Seth Parker Woods in 1972. In her article, Schmid describes the evolution of *Ice Music* as a piece that began as "a piece about time," to one that was "a piece about transformation," to one that, when performed by Seth Parker Woods, serves to "highlight the experience of raced, male, mentally ill bodies in the twenty-first century;" this evolution made possible by the embodied nature of Moorman's performances within her cultural contexts.[230] In such a way, I aim with this dissertation to present Moorman's legacy as both historically significant and as vital to current and future musicological discourse, her contributions persisting as powerful beyond her lifetime.

[230] Caitlin Schmid, "Ice(d) Music/Cello/Bodies: Re-staging Charlotte Moorman's *Ice Music* (1972-2018)," *Twentieth Century Music* 12, no. 2 (2020), 213-245.

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